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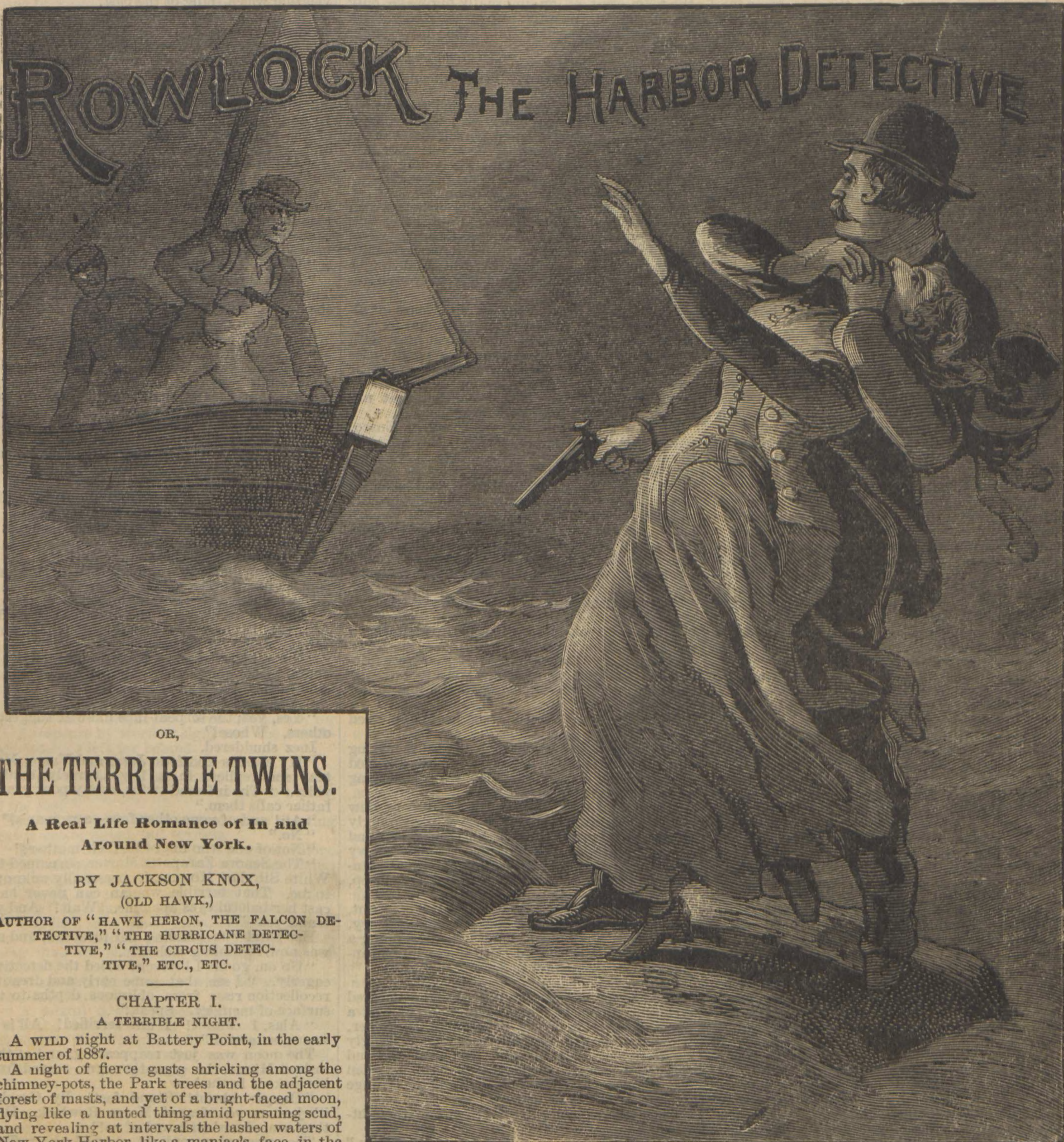
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OR,

THE TERRIBLE TWINS.

A Real Life Romance of In and
Around New York.

BY JACKSON KNOX,
(OLD HAWK.)

AUTHOR OF "HAWK HERON, THE FALCON DE-
TECTIVE," "THE HURRICANE DETEC-
TIVE," "THE CIRCUS DETEC-
TIVE," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

A TERRIBLE NIGHT.

A WILD night at Battery Point, in the early
summer of 1887.

A night of fierce gusts shrieking among the
chimney-pots, the Park trees and the adjacent
forest of masts, and yet of a bright-faced moon,
flying like a hunted thing amid pursuing scud,
and revealing at intervals the lashed waters of
New York Harbor, like a maniac's face in the
soft luster of a silver lamp.

A wild night for an open boat to be abroad on

"DOG OF A DETECTIVE!" HE CRIED; "THINK YOU TO SLEUTH US FOREVER WITH
YOUR CURSED CUNNING?"

the waters, and a yet wilder for a graceful female figure to choose that lonely, crime-infested sea-wall for its promenade.

Yet, such was the case.

The young lady—her youth and breeding were apparent by her dress and carriage, though her face was veiled—had but newly alighted from the Elevated Railroad terminus.

She was now pacing the esplanade fronting the sea-wall, heedless of the questioning looks of a few suspicious lurkers in the vicinity, and with her eyes anxiously fastened upon the approaching boat.

The latter was presently seen to be occupied by two men—a medium-sized, deep-chested and athletic young man, with an authoritative air, and a gigantic negro of herculean proportions.

They had lowered their sail and taken in their oars, the flood tide enabling them to pull in close in under the parapet, without the intervention of a float or bridge.

The young lady presently stooped under the wall-chain in her eagerness, and stood on the extreme outer edge.

The strong gale fluttered her dark garments to one side, while compressing it on the other, to the revelation of her tall, graceful and yet girlish figure, and streamed out her long, fleecy veil like a gauzy pennant.

Presently, as the boat was brought to, she made a swift signal with her ungloved hand.

It was immediately responded to in kind by the young man in the boat.

Then the young lady called out in a rich, clear voice, that was none the less wary and cautious:

"What are you, sir?"

"The Scud," was answered; and then, "What are you for?"

"The Seamew."

"Correct. Anything else?"

"Yes. Captain Grant Marston."

"And you?"

"I am Inez Delorme, the pilot's granddaughter."

"Right again."

"And you?"

"Rowlock Ensco, the Harbor Detective, at Miss Delorme's service."

Inez Delorme made a satisfied gesture, and nimbly seated herself on the edge of the wall, her feet coming within a few inches of the mimic breakers that dashed below.

A crafty action of the oars on the part of the giant negro fetched the boat's stern, in which Rowlock Ensco was standing erect, hovering uneasily directly beneath her position.

The young man stood like a rock, and opened wide his arms.

"The rocks are dangerous hereabouts, and there is no time for ceremony," said he. "Miss Delorme, you must jump for it."

Instantly, and without hesitation, she cleverly threw herself out from the wall.

She was as cleverly caught, steadied, and seated, while Ensco placed himself at the rudder near her.

"Give way, Mingo!" he ordered.

And, still under the negro's powerful strokes, they headed out over the somber, storm-lashed bay.

At times there was nothing but the fitful moonshine, and then again but a rocking ship-light, to show them their way, and yet the detective kept a stern and anxious outlook on every side, as if in precaution against some much dreaded observation or pursuit.

Was it an elopement, or a midnight flight from secret enemies, that so much mystery was preserved?

Certainly not the former, and not altogether the latter; and yet the stealthy departure had been attended by an incident which would have increased the anxiety of both the young lady and her escort, had they but known of it.

While the mysterious watchwords were being exchanged, a well-known river-thief—one of those lurkers in the night who had been furtively watching Inez Delorme's movements on the esplanade—had crept unperceived to within earshot.

The instant after she had sprung into the boat he had sped crouching away toward the boat-landing in the shadow of the United States Barge Office. A lantern was waved thrice, and then, almost before the detective's boat was fairly headed out, a small but stanch sail-boat, crowded with desperate men, had shaken out her leg-of-mutton sail from under the stone pier, and flitted like a storm-bird straight out into the turbulent and uncertain waste.

"Give 'em ample sea-room, Jago," cautioned, with a slightly foreign accent, a slender young man, who seemed to be in command of the mysterious craft, to the man at the rudderlines. "If we intercept them anywhere this side of the Seamew, it will answer. *Caramba*, what a night!"

"*Bueno*, señor!" was the equally guarded answer. "Will that give Señor Juan time for the part he is to play?"

"*Por Dios*, I should say so! The treasure is his lookout, as the young lady is mine, and we have exchanged oaths as to our mutual fidelity. Though, *carajo!*" in a lower and half-grum-

bling voice, "I fancy he has the better bargain of the two, where danger is reckoned."

"Yes, señor," softly assented the steersman, "for but one treasure at a time can be under the escort of Rowlock, the Harbor Detective—a thousand maledictions on him and his!"

Here there was a chorus of laughs and oaths growled, like an echo of the curse, from the desperadoes in the body of the boat.

This was silenced by a fierce exclamation, accompanied by a commanding gesture, from the slender young man.

After that, silent and lightless, the sinister craft swept on, careening almost flat upon her side as she rounded Governor's Island, and gradually vanishing amid the weltering hurry and tumult of the central bay.

In the mean time, the occupants of the Scud, as the detective's boat was named, had proceeded more leisurely on their way, without suspecting the treachery preparing for them.

After standing well out from shore, the sail had been loosened to the gale, and the little craft was fairly dancing over the waves.

"I rather think the coast is clear now," said Ensco, cheerily. "If you do not become seasick, Miss Delorme, all should go well till you are safe with your grandfather on the gallant Seamew."

"I am too much of a sailor to fear the *mal de mer*, Mr. Ensco," was the collected reply from behind the fluttering veil. "But," a little anxiously, "isn't this a rather small boat for—such stormy work?"

He laughed reassuringly as the Scud feathered the foam-crest of an unusually big wave, only to spring, apparently, upon another, with scarcely a subsidence into the intervening trough.

"No fear of that," said he. "The Scud is of a life-boat pattern, and fairly unsinkable, I think."

Then there was a pause, in which they had a chance to study each other at leisure, though the young lady had availed herself of that the very first.

She secretly confessed that the young man's appearance was not a little in his favor.

But was he altogether a young man?

His fairness of feature, with his curling brown mustache and thick-crisping light hair, was certainly indicative of the care-free frankness of early manhood. But, there were stern lines about the cool, steadfast gray eyes that might speak of long experience and adventurous antecedents.

As it was, she could only set his years at almost anywhere between twenty-five and forty.

For the rest, he was about five feet nine, with almost any muscular and gymnastic possibilities underneath the careless boatman's costume of navy blue that he wore so becomingly.

"There was yet another caution that my grandfather gave me," said Inez, at last.

"I can guess what it was," replied Ensco, with his engaging laugh. "How suspicious is the old sea-dog!"

"Can you blame him for that?"

"Not I." His brow contracted, and he again threw a searching glance around over the tumbling waters. "With the powerful machinations of such accomplished scoundrels as those dare-devil grand-nephews of his, Juan and Vasco Martez, to be guarded against—but really I beg your pardon, miss! They must be your own cousins."

An impatient gesture of the ungloved treasure of a hand.

"You said you could guess my grandfather's parting caution."

"So I can. It was this: After you were fairly afloat with me, as now, you were to make assurance doubly sure by demanding a final proof that I am I."

"That was it." With a shade of suppressed curiosity.

The moon passed under a cloud. Its recurring effulgence showed the detective to have stripped his right arm to the shoulder, while steadying the rebellious tiller with the left.

It was a magnificent arm thus bared to view—shapely as a duchess's, with a skin seemingly smooth and hard as marble, masking thews and sinews of corded steel, and none the less snowy of surface, save for a remarkable representation, spreading from wrist to shoulder in deep, varied and indelible tattoo.

It was that of an athlete and a serpent, wreathed in deadly conflict for the mastery, while from a thunder-cloud was descending a crimson arrow, blazoned with the scriptural injunction, "*Vengeance is Mine!*"

Inez bowed her head in acquiescence.

She had merely time to note that the pictured wrestler, albeit in classic semi-nudity, was a passable portrait of the young man before her, while the serpent countenance was strikingly suggestive of an infuriated woman's head and face, beautiful, yet fiendishly malignant, when the uprolled sleeve was replaced, and the strange exhibition was at an end.

The detective had grown grave and thoughtful.

"You are now to satisfy me in your turn," said he, in a low voice.

"That I am I?"

"Yes."

"What did my grandfather tell you should be the test on my part?"

"I can only answer when I shall have seen your face."

She hesitated an instant, and then threw back her veil.

Rowlock Ensco uttered a low cry, and then clasped his hands.

The cry was expressive of amazed admiration, the action of combined wonder, incredulosity and even resentment, while his handsome face was the mirror of these conflicting emotions.

The admiration was natural enough—as natural as that evoked by the inimitable sun-burst in the skylark's worshipping hymn.

Such a face is seldom vouchsafed to the privileged gaze as was then and there revealed for the first time to the enraptured detective.

An angelic face, purely American in its exquisite fairness (a healthful, lamp-like pallor, is the better distinction), statuesque chiseling and pronounced individuality; Spanish in the soulful duskiness of the large, well-like eyes, with the perfect brows and long-bent lashes of jetty silkiness, and in the rich wavy masses of blue-black hair, to say nothing of the perfect figure's airy and majestic pose.

The gazer's resentment, or mortification, if such it could be called, was more inexplicable.

That the owner of so much loveliness thought so was speedily apparent.

"I see that you, sir, are also satisfied," said she, after quickly replacing her veil, while the moonlight that had transiently assisted the revelation was a thing of the past.

"Perfectly," was the low-voiced and constrained answer.

"And yet—there was something wanting?"

"Not that—something unexpected."

"I do not understand."

"I was prepared to find in the pilot's granddaughter a beauty little short of superhuman. In that way, the revelation was a fulfillment of the test that Captain Marston advised me of."

"Ah!" a little disdainfully.

"Yes. 'The enemy,' said the old sea-wolf, 'cannot, with all their cunning, impose any feminine counterfeit upon you, if you but once look in Inez Delorme's face. Its beauty is unexampled, its loveliness richer than mortal man's intensest dream.'"

"Well?" This with a touch of amusement.

"Well, the conditions of the test are fulfilled. There can be one Inez Delorme, and you are she."

"Still, you were disappointed."

"No—startled."

"That was it. Why?"

"Does not your own face suggest another to your mind?"

"Not that I can recall. A likeness, do you mean?"

"Yes; or rather a suggestion."

"Say, a likeness, then."

"So be it. A likeness almost equally beautiful, and yet older and terrible—terrible, malevolent and deadly."

His words were earnest and mournful. The young girl made an agitated movement.

"Be more explicit. My features suggest a resemblance to what others?"

His bent nearer to hers in the darkness.

"Did you mark the woman-face of the serpent on my arm?"

Her agitation was now unmistakable.

"Good heavens, yes!" she faltered. "And—Ah, the likeness was there! I see it now."

What entangling mystery is this?"

"None, believe me, to ensnare such purity as yours. But complete your broken sentence. And—what?"

"Alas! sir, I am terrified. I know not."

"Yes, yes; the serpent-face likewise suggested others. Whose?"

Inez shuddered.

"My cousins and foes, Juan and Vasco Martez," she replied, in a low, scarcely audible voice. "The infernal twins, as my poor grandfather calls them."

"Ah! and of none other face—a woman's?"

"No."

"Not of one who might be their mother?"

"The Senora Zarapatta Martez, surnamed the White Sibyl of Morona, is personally unknown to me. That terrible woman can never have cast her baleful eyes upon me. Wait! And yet—and yet—"

Her hand was pressing her forehead, and she was now trembling violently.

"Go on, go on, I beseech!" cried the detective, eagerly. "I see that some early and dreadful recollection rises from oblivious depths to the surface of memory. Speak!"

"Alas, I cannot! I am terrified! All is so vague, so awful!"

The moon was just reappearing, and at that instant Mingo, the gigantic negro, roared from his lookout in the bow:

"Danger ahead! Stand fast! By Cracky! it's jess as you feared, Marse Rowlock. Here they are, almos' on board of us!"

The renewed moonlight showed the ruffian-crammed pursuing craft tottering on a huge wave, bow-on, hardly a cable's length away.

"Tracked at last, and by Vasco Martez and his crew!" exclaimed Inez, in an appalled tone. "Now Heaven be with me!"

CHAPTER II.

INEZ DELORME.

THE boats had perceived each other at the same instant.

There was a chorus of exultant yells from the larger craft—such as might have been suddenly unmasked upon a trembling and defenseless merchant man from an old-time cut-throat cruiser of the Spanish Main, with the ominous black flag unexpectedly flung from her peak.

Then the commander, Vasco Martez, the graceful and slender young man whom the reader has already had a glimpse of, sprung erect in the stern, a glistening revolver in his right hand.

"Hold hard to grapple 'em!" he shouted. "If the young lady is surrendered unresistingly, no violence shall be offered."

Save calling out a few words in a low, distinct tone to Mingo, the detective had as yet said nothing, but was sitting calmly with both rudder and sail under his perfect control.

"Crouch a little lower under the gunwale, and fear nothing," he now muttered reassuringly to the trembling Inez, who mutely obeyed. "Our coat is of steel, and theirs of wood. There is nothing whatever to fear, as you shall presently see."

At this instant the Scud was sheered off slantingly, as if by magic, just as the enemy came broadside-on, less than a yard distant, and with every desperado springing to his feet, preparing to lay aboard.

"Now, Mingo!" called out Ensco, the words quitting his lips like pistol-shots. "Now!"

Instantly the gigantic negro was on his feet, armed with an enormous belaying pin, from whose square-blunted end a short, keen knife-blade protruded.

He was like an incarnate fiend.

With one lightning-like sweep of the huge pin and knife, the crowded line of ruffians along the hostile gunwale were sent tumbling down like a row of bricks.

A second, up-and-down stroke split the great sail, from gaff to spanker-boom, as it flopped over in the heel of the wave, and then the Night Hawk, as the predatory craft was fitly named, went drifting helplessly astern, without a single grapnel having caught.

"Steady!" called out the Harbor Detective's collected voice. "That will do for the present, Mingo. Now, again!"

The Scud, obedient to the rudder as a swift courser to the master-hand, had tacked as if by magic, and now, poised like an avenging bird on the summit of a huge wave, was hovering, prow-on, over the helpless Night Hawk, while the boom swung easily around to catch the fullness on her quarter.

Vasco Martez, white with baffled fury, leveled his revolver at the detective's breast.

"Everlasting Marplot! Hound of a detective!" he snarled; "my mother's, no less than my own and my brother's, wrongs upon your accursed head! Die in your tracks!"

The unsteady weapon missed fire, and there was no chance for a second essay.

At that instant the Scud shot forward and down like a bolt, her steel prow cutting through the Night Hawk directly amidships, and then recoiling from the shock, went on with scarcely a moment's pause.

"Ensco, beware!" yelled Vasco Martez, a moment or two later, from his clinging hold upon a fragment of the wreck. "Juan has ere this seized the treasure chest, Inez shall yet be mine, and the witch-faced serpent of your accursed emblem shall yet triumph in the strife."

The detective might have been of marble, for all of response by word or sign, and the wreck-age was soon left far behind.

Inez had buried her face in her hands.

"Weep not, lady!" said Rowlock, with indescribable gentleness. "Your danger is a thing of the past."

She raised her face, unvailed now, showing that it was agitated, but tearless.

"It is not the danger—that is over and done for us," she murmured. "But ah! those struggling wretches in the water!"

"They'll be picked up, never fear—more's the pity!" in a hard, contemptuous tone.

"But then my Cousin Vasco's parting threat! Oh! if the treasure *should* be gone—if something dreadful should have happened on the Seamew!"

And she shuddered again, while her great eyes questioned him eagerly.

"A pitiful coward's boastful prediction, in which the hope was father to the words—nothing more! Give it not another thought!"

Then, seeing that she was somewhat relieved, his own face was expressive of eagerness, painfully expressed.

"Our fates seem to be closely associated, through our common foes," said he, guardedly—"more closely than I could have supposed."

"So it would seem. Ah! that mysterious allusion to the tattooed emblem on your arm! What can it mean?"

"You shall some time have its solution—that is, should you desire it."

"Desire it!"

"But"—a little timidly—"might not your own history be more to the point, in view of present complications?"

She looked at him hesitatingly.

"My grandfather has perfect confidence in you. He has told me so. Has he not been explicit in his explanations to you?"

"No. Captain Marston has thus far given me but a faint outline of the perils that threaten you. Perhaps he opined that his granddaughter would be more—more trustful."

She had been gravely studying his features in the moonlight.

"You can be velvet or steel, scabbard or blade, at need," she murmured, half to herself. "After what has happened to-night, I feel that I can trust you."

"I am sure you can."

They were just entering the Narrows, though laboriously against a strong head-wind, the gale having shifted several points, and the short, thumping seas running yet more vexatiously.

The moon and stars were yet more chary of their uncertain light, though far away in the East the increased somberness was but premonitory of a new day's dawn.

It was under these circumstances, and quite suddenly, without further persuasion, as though under an impulse she refused to restrain, that Inez began to recount her brief but eventful history.

"Captain Marston, as you doubtless know, is my grandfather on my mother's side. Whether I am an orphan or not I do not know. I have an indistinct recollection of my father and mother. But all is confused, and they somehow faded out of my life. If they are dead, I know nothing of their graves; if still living, their whereabouts is no less a mystery—that is to me. On this subject alone, a subject that is naturally vital to me, my grandfather, though in everything else so kind, so tender, so more than indulgent, has ever been morosely, inexorably silent. You know his iron mood when once crystallized into permanency. To say that all mention of the topic, so dear to my heart, so haunting to my soul, has been interdicted is not enough. Between my grandfather and me, it has been as though entombed, or, rather, as unborn and non-existent. I have lived with my grandfather as long as I can remember. He has been all in all to me. As the old pilot's granddaughter, I have been his petted treasure, my every caprice gratified, my slightest wish his law. Perhaps it is well for both him and me that my nature is not an exacting one. Otherwise, I might have been spoiled and he rendered unhappy by my waywardness."

She smiled a little sadly, and then, perceiving the rapt earnestness of her auditor's attention, colored a little and proceeded more hurriedly.

"Those earlier years of mine with my good old grandfather were of unalloyed happiness, though spent in comparative seclusion in his old yellow mansion and grounds on the breezy river-bank, near the foot of East Eighty-sixth street, whose locality you are perhaps acquainted with."

Ensco bowed his head.

"With himself, old Mrs. Twiggs, his house-keeper, and the few servants, I was as happy and care-free as the day was long. Whether out on the river fishing with grandpapa, the companion of his cruises in the Seamew, skurrying away over the new-made streets and old lanes on my Mexican pony, devising home-sports with my few playmates of the neighborhood (in which grandpapa likewise seldom failed to participate,) or in practising my studies under my visiting governess or under my various tutors, he also being mostly present, it was a gay and sweet life, that life of my early girlhood, such as I may never know again. Then"—she sighed deeply—"my second cousins, the twins, Juan and Vasco Martez, became members of our household, and there was a change—such a change!"

"When was that?" Ensco questioned eagerly, as she came to a troubled pause. "Pardon my impulsiveness, but the time may be of importance to me. About how old were you then?"

"Eight or nine, I should say; and I am now nineteen."

"So! And the particulars of their arrival—would you object to stating some of them?"

"Not at all."

"They arrived from—?"

"From somewhere in Mexico or Honduras, I am uncertain which."

"You will excuse the apparent importunity of my interrogations?"

"Pray, proceed."

"How are you related to those young men?"

"They are the sons of a niece of my grandfather's, the daughter of a wayward sister of his, so I have understood, by a Spanish marriage. She had married General Martez, a Mexican revolutionist of some distinction, I believe, Juan and Vasco being the fruit of the union."

A look of hatred flashed over the detective's face.

"She, their mother—you have never met, then?"

"Thank Heaven, no! at least, not to my knowledge."

"And yet to-night you have alluded to her by name—the Senora Zarapatta Martez, surnamed the White Sibyl of Morona."

Inez gave a little shiver.

"That terrible woman! yes, by reputation she is known to me."

"The twins, how old were they on their arrival at your grandfather's?"

"About sixteen—almost double my own age at that time, I should say."

"Yet they came not alone?"

"No. They were accompanied by a tall and graceful woman, whom I took to be a nurse or trusted dependent. Her face was almost constantly concealed, like that of a nun, with white wrappings, as though she might be a sufferer from neuralgia, and my grandfather seemed to dislike her, almost to abhorrence."

"Aha! and doubtless with reason. What do you recollect of her?"

"But little, for she was with us only two days, and seemed to avoid me. But I overheard her and my grandfather in several stormy interviews. They were mostly carried on in the Spanish tongue, with which I was not then familiar. But sometimes they spoke in English."

"Enough to give you an inkling of their dispute?"

"Yes."

"And that was—?"

"The disposition of a treasure chest of superb gems, which the woman and boys had brought with them, and given into Captain Marston's care. It was the same that has caused all the trouble since—that he is even now so anxious to carry out of their reach in the Seamew."

"Ah! and this treasure?"

"It consisted of priceless state and other jewels, and had been sent for safe-keeping to Captain Marston by General Martez, as the chief proceeds of some partly successful Central American revolution in which he was then engaged."

"Well?"

"Dona Anita, as the strange woman called herself, wanted my grandfather to convert the jewels into cash without delay, for the benefit of the twins and herself, as their guardian. This he steadfastly refused to do, claiming that to do so would be to betray the trust reposed in him by General Martez, of whom he seemed to have a high opinion. Hence the disputes—for he had secured the treasure beyond the woman's reach directly upon receiving it. Dona Anita at last took herself off very abruptly, leaving the lads with us."

"And you never saw the strange woman's face?"

"But once—by the merest accident—and that was once too often. Oh, it was terrible!"

"In what way?"

"Oh, it was so beautiful and yet so corpse-like, and with the expression of a fiend! She was fresh from one of those baffling interviews with my grandfather, and her lineaments, from which she had inadvertently torn the coverings, were distorted with such evil passions as I had not deemed could find a lodgment in the human breast. Ah! the face of a demoness—a tigress—a serpent! It haunts me yet."

Inez shuddered, and bowed her face in her hands.

When she looked up, Rowlock had again bared his tattooed arm to her gaze.

"Was it a countenance resembling *this*?"

And he indicated the woman-face of the serpent in the emblem.

Inez gazed with starting eyes.

"Yes, yes! Heavens! why did I not connect the two before? The same, the same!"

The detective replaced the sleeve.

"Child, it was no nurse-woman's face that was revealed to you," he exclaimed, in a deep, impressive voice. "You then made the acquaintance of the fiend-mother of the demon twins. Dona Anita and the Senora Zarapatta Martez were one and the same!"

"Ha! are you sure?"

"Perfectly sure."

"What! I have really looked, then, in the face of that terrible woman—that beautiful monster?"

"Truly; and well may you designate her a monster. Do you know what she did after leaving her precious twins in Captain Marston's care?"

"I know nothing."

"She hurried back to Honduras, secretly sold her own husband, the unfortunate General Martez, into the hands of his enemies for a round sum, and he was executed the next day at sunrise in Comayagua."

"Oh, shame, horror!"

"But the unvarnished truth. Since that infamy, as the White Sibyl of Morona, she has mostly lived like a sorceress-queen in her mountain retreat of the Cordilleras, loathed but dreaded, on the proceeds of her treachery, her sole remaining desires, to repossess herself of the jeweled treasure, through the villainous agency of her sons, to get *you* in her clutches as the

bride of one of them, she doubtless cares not which, and—to accomplish *my* destruction."

Inez gazed at the speaker with renewed interest in the midst of her terror.

"You, too!" she murmured. "Is your fate, then, so inextricably blended with mine?"

He gravely bowed his head, and then extended his hand.

"It is even so! Lady, I would be your champion to the end, whatever that may be. Is it a compact? If so, give me your fair hand upon it."

She seemed to hesitate.

"Perhaps I cannot blame you," said the detective, mournfully. "This hand, in which I ask you to place your own, is not unstained with blood, though never yet—I swear it!—save in self-defense or in a righteous cause."

With a sudden impulse, she placed her hand in his.

He reverently raised it to his lips, while turning his eyes aloft, at the same time murmuring an invocation under his breath, and both felt that a solemn compact had been sealed.

"It is well," said the detective, with intense thankfulness. "Inez Delorme, come what may, you are from this hour not alone in the troubles that seem thickening around you—Rowlock Ensco is henceforth your adviser, your friend and your champion to the bitter end!"

"I gratefully accept you as such, sir," answered the young girl, fervently. "And may Providence speed the virtuous, the weak and the wronged in whatever trials Fate may have in store for us!"

"Amen! Now a few questions more will elicit the more important elements of your past history."

"Put them to me."

"How long did the twins remain with your grandfather?"

"Until their twentieth year."

"What was their behavior?"

"That of unconscionable ingrates! Iniquity is ingrained in their natures. They were wild, cruel and lawless from the first. They repeatedly forged my grandfather's signature to checks for inconsiderable amounts, besides attempting criminal practices of a much graver sort, and were as often forgiven—perforce you might almost say. For they resemble each other so exactly—a slight birth-mark on Juan's left cheek being almost the sole distinction between them—as to nearly defy the bringing home of any misdemeanor to them separately, and they were shrewd enough to attempt no considerable mischief in unison."

"That tell-tale birth-mark—the crimson poniard—on the elder's cheek, how well do I know it!"

Here a cheery call from Mingo, at the bow, apprised them that the Seamew was at last in sight.

In the growing light of the new day, they could see her rocking gently at her anchorage in the quiet waters under the lee of the Fort Wadsworth water-battery, a little to the south of the Clifton, or lower Staten Island Ferry landing.

CHAPTER III.

THE TREASURE-CHEST.

BUT, as considerable tacking and rough sailing were still necessary before reaching the yacht, the Harbor Detective resumed his interrogations.

"What, may I ask, was the cause of the young men's final dismissal from your grandfather's household, Miss Delorme?"

Inez colored furiously, as if under a particularly exasperating recollection.

"They dismissed themselves—fled under the cover of night, like the ignominious felons that they were—or it would have been the worse for them. Otherwise, grandpapa would have prosecuted them mercilessly—they had at last overleaped the bounds of his forgiveness!"

"And the cause?"

"There was more than one. Even at that age, they had become associated with organized bands of river thieves and other desperate characters—much the same class as their money and fearlessness now enable them to enlist in their service. More than this, grandpapa discovered that they had been constantly in secret communication with their infamous mother."

"To what end?"

"Ah! can you not guess? To gain possession of the jewel-chest at any cost. It was my grandfather's timely detection of a plot, on the part of Juan and Vasco, doubtless with the connivance of outside confederates, to murder him in his bed, in order to get at the strong room containing the treasure, that terrified and confused them at last. In fact, every member of the household, with the single exception of my poor self (I was marked as a chief part of the booty, it seemed) was to be assassinated in cold blood."

"Monstrous! No wonder they fled on the exposure of such a plot."

"Yet there was something that my grandfather found yet more unpardonable. The exposure was indirectly brought about by—"

She hesitated, and the detective, whose eyes were thoughtfully lowered, could not see the

blush of indignant shame that was mantling the pure face.

"By what?" he asked.

"By—by an indignity offered to me by Vasco. Though but thirteen, I—I had the appearance of being much older, and—and—"

"The scoundrel! Say no more of it. Oh, how can you forgive my want of tact—my brutal inconsiderateness?"

She made a disclaiming gesture, and quickly recovered her composure.

"Then," continued the detective, after a long pause, "you had no further trouble with the rascally pair until their recent reappearance in New York?"

"No; nor so much as any knowledge of them. Indeed, my grandfather had begun to hope that the senora and her sons had given over all designs upon the treasure, and decided to leave him in peace. But the first of the recent attempts to break into our house, and get at the strong room, opened his eyes rudely enough to the false security into which he had lulled himself. Threatening anonymous letters, in one or another of the brothers' handwriting, followed, and these were succeeded by the two other house-breaking attempts, of which you are doubtless aware."

The detective nodded.

"You know my grandfather's old-fashioned prejudice against banks and similar institutions," resumed Inez. "After these last attempts upon the treasure, I became so alarmed for his safety that I renewed my oft-repeated entreaties that he would place the dangerous fascination forever beyond the cupidity of those cunning, powerful, and persistent foes by consigning it to the robber-proof vaults of a safe deposit company. But, no; he would not hear of it. It was then, however, that he consented to allay my fears by advancing the Quixotic scheme—an idea, for all the world, of just such an impracticable, dear, darling old sea rover as he is—of which our present perilous harbor expedition is one of the primary steps. Accompanied by you and me, together with such of his old yachting crew as have been in his pay for years, and what other seamen might be demanded, he would carry the treasure far away in the old Seamew to a lone island bank that he knew of in the Caribbean sea. There he would bury it in a secret spot with his own hands. And there it should remain undisturbed forever, or until its rightful owners—the unfortunate Central American families who had contributed their precious heirlooms to speed the political revolution in which General Martez so fatally failed, doubtless involving them in his ruin—should present and make good to him their just demands for a restoration of the property."

"Still," said the detective, "the incorruptible integrity of the old gentleman in regarding himself as merely the responsible custodian of such a treasure, so immense in value, so vague as to its real ownership, more than condones the Quixotism of this scheme of his for its safe-keeping."

Inez adored her grandfather, and she cast a grateful look at the detective for these kindly words.

It was near sunrise, and they were rapidly approaching the Seamew at her quiet anchorage.

"How beautiful she looks—just like 'a thing of life,' and yet so peaceful and secure!" exclaimed the young girl. "Ah, surely no misfortune can have come to any of her inmates! And yet it seems odd that neither grandpapa nor one of his men is on the lookout for our coming."

That Ensco was of a like mind was quite evident, for he had suddenly grown thoughtful and grave.

"Ease her off, Mingo!" was his order as they were laying alongside. "There!" and down came the Scud's sail with a run. "Remain where you are, Miss Delorme."

But, nautically expert as she was, Inez had lightly followed him and the negro up over the yacht's side a moment later.

It was only to encounter them, reeling back out of the cabin entrance, with looks of horror in their faces.

"Stop, Miss Delorme, you must not go in there!" cried Ensco, in a strangely changed, hoarse voice, and he made a spring to intercept her. "It is not fit—something has happened. Really—"

But she had evaded him, and was already at the open cabin door.

Then her shriek rung abroad, and, with wide-staring eyes fixed upon a ghastly scene, she would have fallen but for the detective's supporting arm.

"Something" bad, indeed, happened.

The cabin interior was literally wrecked, and evidently the recent scene of a murderous struggle.

The insensible form of Captain Marston lay behind the overturned chart-table, the venerable face streaked with blood, the bald head crushed in by repeated blows, doubtless from a heavy chair, whose shivered fragments were strewn over the body.

Just inside the door lay the captain's faithful steward, Mala, an old Sandwich Islander, his head and face beaten to a jelly.

The dead body of Hammond, the yacht's second officer, a life-long servitor and friend of the owner, was outside near the foot of the short companionway, mercilessly stabbed, a frown on the face, a broken capstan bar in the knotted hands.

Blood and confusion everywhere, doubtless the relics of a murderous midnight strife, in which crime had triumphed.

And of robbery as well!

The small iron safe, directly behind where the old captain lay, open, its massive door, with the combination lock, blown from its hinges—the interior empty, the treasure-chest gone!

A single glance had betrayed these ghastly particulars.

Then, followed by Mingo, the detective had lost not a moment in bearing the swooning Inez back to the open air of the deck.

This move had hardly been effected before there was a cheery hail from the yacht's boat that was approaching from the shore.

In it were John Dago, the Seamew's chief officer, with two seamen at the oars, all of them old and trusted hands.

Wholly unsuspecting of the tragic event, as was evident at a glance, they made the boat fast and lightly leaped over the side, when the fainting girl and the appalled looks of the two men were their first hint of what was in store for them.

In a moment Dago had taken in the awful scene, and joined the group on deck, leaving his companions, half-paralyzed with horror, below.

"Merciful Heaven!" he gasped, as soon as he could find speech, "I see it all now. This comes of hiring those suspicious-looking new hands, that I was so dead against, though Captain Marston wouldn't listen to a delay that better ones might be looked up. They're at the bottom of this work—I'd swear to it!—especially the slim chap as shipped for bo'sen's mate."

The detective caught at the words.

"What was *he* like?" was his swift demand.

"Young, supple an' handsome, black eyes, black mustache, curling black hair, gentlemanly an' soft-spoken, too, barrin' a treacherous, skulking look, and with a little red birth-mark, something like an arrer, on his left cheek, that he seemed precious anxious to hide."

Inez had reopened her horrified eyes, and overheard the characteristic description.

"Juan Martez—the elder of the accursed twins!" she shrieked, springing out of the detective's support, and wildly clinching her hands. "Oh, misery, misery! Vasco's boast was not an idle one!"

Here one of the sailors came running up the companionway, calling out that Captain Marston was still alive and partly conscious.

Ensco was the first to re-enter the cabin, having resolutely intercepted Inez's frantic rush to precede him.

As he strode over to where the old captain was supported by the sailor who had remained there, something glittering caught his attention on the floor.

It was a sapphire ring, set round with brilliants, which he succeeded in securing without being perceived.

The terribly wounded gentleman, who was obviously near his last extremity, made a sign of recognition, and then by an effort he laid his hand tenderly upon the head of the young girl, who had sunk, voiceless in her anguish, in a kneeling attitude at his side.

"Ensco," he gasped, "she is under your protection now. You—you will accept the trust?"

"With my life!" was the stern response.

"The treasure gone—the accursed twins and their sorceress-dam victorious at last—but you will keep up the quest, the defense, the revenge, Ensco—you will not falter?"

"Not while life remains to me!" and the detective solemnly raised his hand. "It is an oath—an oath in heaven!"

"Ha! Good, excellent! Oh, Ensco!" the dying man suddenly raised himself, throwing his limp arms around the detective's neck. "Quick, ere it be too late! There is a secret—the fate of my daughter, Nessie's mother, and of George Delorme, her husband—"

"Speak, grandpapa, speak at last!" cried Inez, wildly. "My parents—are they alive or dead?"

The glazing eyes glared at her.

"Alive, perhaps," came in a husky whisper, "but, better dead, far better!"

"Say not so! Tell me where they are! Oh, grandpapa, as you stand in this extremity, speak!"

But further speech was impossible.

There was gush of blood from the old man's lips, an inarticulate cry, that sounded like "Land ho! land at last!" and then, as the young girl's despairing wail went forth, he was gone!

CHAPTER IV.

A FORTNIGHT LATER.

AT dusk of a fine day, a fortnight after the tragedy of the yacht Seamew, Inez Delorme stood in the drawing-room facing the river of the old Marston residence.

Her hat was on, and she was about to step out into the grounds.

Mrs. Twiggs, the old housekeeper, who had been almost a mother to the young girl, looked up a little anxiously from her sewing-chair. "I wouldn't go just yet, dear," said she. "You haven't yet received Mr. Ensco's signal."

"No, aunt," it was thus that Inez mostly addressed the housekeeper, "but look!" and she peered out over the lawn and darkening water; "yonder is the twinkle of the Seamew's lantern, rocking at the anchorage just off Astoria."

"But the detective was not to put off for this interview until quite dark, and the twilight is not gone."

Inez sighed.

The wearing shock of her grandfather's tragic death—as yet unavenged, or even brought home to the perpetrators—still showed its subduing traces in her soft beauty, though she seemed lovelier than ever.

"What of that? It is so stupid, remaining shut up here so incessantly, as in a besieged cabin in the Indian country."

"There are enemies, more cunning and pitiless than red savages, for you to be guarded against, dearie," urged the old lady, impressively.

"But we have no longer with us the treasure-chest, aunt, which all these bolts and bars and cast-iron regulations were intended to defend."

Then her lip trembled at the thought that the dear, good grandfather was no longer with them either—passed forever to that mysterious bourne from which no traveler returns.

Mrs. Twiggs looked up at her lovingly over her spectacles.

"You forget, my dear, that we have still in keeping a yet more priceless treasure, which those devil's whelps, Juan and Vasco, are fully as determined to carry off as was their terrible mother in the case of the jewel-chest."

A flash of hatred and fear crossed the fair young brow, and then the discontent reappeared in the lovely face.

"Oh, yes; you mean me, of course."

"Of course, dearie!" And Mrs. Twiggs dropped her knitting to take one of the soft, listlessly-hanging little hands, which she patted and smoothed between her dry old palms. "Whom else but my darling?"

"Treasure, indeed!" Inez's tone was passionately in earnest. "I wish—I wish—"

"Well, and what does my darling wish?"

"Oh! next to bringing Juan and Vasco to the scaffold, aunt, I wish that I were ugly and poor, instead of handsome and rich, or else—just dead!"

"Tut, tut, tut! Wild words, these, for my petted Inez to speak!"

"But I'm not petted—save by you now, aunt." And there was a kindly answer to the pressure of the fondling palms. "Petted, indeed! to be up here, day in and day out, as in a jail, with only an occasional peek out at the door or window for a mouthful of fresh air!"

"But it cannot be for long, dearie. Remember, it is by Mr. Ensco's earnest advice."

"As if I should forget it!"

"The criminal young men once captured, and their crimes brought home to them, as the Harbor Detective is now striving for, and my darling will once more have the world of love and admiration at her pretty feet."

"Ah, no, aunt!" despondently. "I shall never love or be loved. Of that I am quite positive."

Mrs. Twiggs, having forgotten the unconscious hypocrisies of maidenhood, always took Inez seriously.

"Not love or be loved!" she repeated. "Bless me, my child! what else are you made for?"

"I don't know; to be dogged, and watched, and made miserable, I suppose."

"Nonsense, sheer nonsense! Why, Mr. Ensco was saying to me, on the occasion of his last secret visit here—But, bless me! what ails you, my dear?"

Inez had snatched away her hand but the old lady's imperfect eyesight fortunately failed to mark the telltale color—invariably invoked of late at the mere mention of the handsome detective's name in anything like an emotional connection—that had suddenly overspread the pure pallor of the fair young face.

"Nothing," was the short reply. "Well, well, Aunt Twiggs; Mr. Ensco was saying to you—?"

"That you must still keep close, my dear; but that, the danger once passed, you might safely enter but to conquer upon the world of wealth and fashion and admiration that is doubtless impatient to applaud your debut."

"Oh!" a little disappointedly.

"Yes; and that your peerless beauty and rare accomplishments could not fail to win your choice from among the richest, highest-placed and most distinguished in all the land for a husband."

"Indeed!"

"Yes; and I couldn't exactly understand, for he seemed so downhearted and cheerless-like while he was predicting so many pretty and brilliant things for you."

"You are sure he seemed that way?" eagerly.

"To be sure I am, dearie; and, as he turned away, he muttered something about a poor and obscure man having no chance, no matter how

much he might love and do for you, as a simple matter of course. 'Oh, that stands to reason, Mr. Ensco!' says I. 'Just as our Nessie is a natural-born princess among girls, just so sure could she never think of any wooer who might be only poor, but honest, and otherwise unworthy. And for that matter,' says I—"

Inez, or "Nessie," cut her short by throwing her arms around the old neck, and bursting into a laugh that was like chime of joy-bells—her sweet, natural laugh that had hardly been heard since the sunrise tragedy on board the Seamew.

"Oh, you dear, darling old goose!" she cried; "you know all about it, of course, don't you? You are just as deep, and penetrative, and far-seeing as the stupid men themselves, aren't you?"

"I really don't exactly understand, my dear."

But Nessie was once more at the window.

"The signal!" she exclaimed. "There it is—four swings of a red lantern, just as the detective agreed!"

"Wait! no haste! Don't forget his warning against a false signal, or some other cunning trick," said Mrs. Twiggs, who could see better at a distance than nearer at hand. "Hal! Caution's the word, Nessie."

"Nonsense, aunt! Don't you mark the flashes?"

"Yes; directly under the lawn's end there, while Ensco's were to come from midstream, while passing from the Seamew to the landing. Stop, Nessie, stop! Don't dare to forget the precautions! Some trick, some treachery—"

But, Inez had already darted into the hall, after vouchsafing a little reassuring kiss.

She could be heard giving hurried orders to the servant, who was unbarring the front door, for the fort-like safeguards of the old mansion, instituted by the late eccentric proprietor, had been sedulously kept up, at the detective's suggestion.

Then, before Mrs. Twiggs could run after her, she had disappeared.

The Marston residence was a somewhat neglected mansion of old-time stateliness, in the midst of extensive grounds, a little north of East Eighty-sixth street, on the river-bank—with a public boating and bathing float below, near the foot of that growing thoroughfare, and the grounds of the House of the Good Shepherd adjoining on the north—which is familiar to residents and rambles in that section of Yorkville by its incongruous but agreeable rusticity in the midst of the prosaic brick-and-mortar improvements, finished, finishing, and just beginning, on every hand except that of the broad river front, with its superb view of Hell Gate, the intermediate island-ends, and the opposite Long Island shore, though another pleasant break in the city river-line is supplied by the East River Park, adjoining Eighty-sixth street on the south.

Inez merely nodded to the old coachman, who was sturdily patrolling the grounds, bludgeon in hand, and then sped on through the dusk for the private boat-landing just below the lawn-embankment.

The red lantern had repeated the signal, and then remained stationary.

She had no sooner descended the bank than, with a swiftly-interrupted scream of terror, she found herself a captive in the combined grasp of the dread twins, Juan and Vasco Martez.

CHAPTER V.

THE INFERNAL TWINS' WORK.

"SILENCE!" exclaimed Vasco, who had the firmest hold of the young girl, while Juan was assisting in gagging and controlling her; "silence, or we shall be forced to kill you! Submit, and there is nothing but happiness in store for you."

"He speaks truly, Cousin Nessie," said Juan. "This abduction has become a family necessity—no more no less. No violence or indignity is dreamed of."

From the hands of the latter especially—stained with her grandfather's murder, as she had not the shadow of a doubt—the young girl shrunk in a sort of frenzy, but they were both sinewy and determined beyond her utmost resistance.

They spoke in low tones, and were dragging her toward the small landing, at which their row-boat, containing the false light that had deluded her, was in waiting.

Inez succeeded in uttering yet another half-scream.

Then a soft and painless but effective gag was secured over her lips, and she was hurried into the stern of the boat, with one of her immediate captors on either side of her.

"Give way!" growled Juan. "Caramba! that last cry was not unheard."

The long, spoon-shaped skulls of four ruffianly oarsmen bit the shimmering gloom of the water at the same instant, and the keen, narrow boat shot out and away like an arrow let fly.

Juan's anxiety was not misplaced. Nessie's last cry had not passed unheard.

Old John, the coachman on patrol duty, was already on the retreating bank, calling out her name and sounding a general alarm in stentorian tones.

"No ciudadano!" commented Vasco, placidly. "Let him roar!"

They rowed with the tide, which was swirling up in the direction of Hell Gate with fierce velocity.

But at that instant the true signal, which Nessie's impetuosity had not been content to make sure of—four swayings of a red lantern from a boat midway between the Seamew's distant anchorage and the homestead grounds—flashed up through the deepening dusk.

The captive made a movement both of hope and despair, but the young men only laughed.

"Carajo! little good will it do the Harbor Detective now," said Juan, lighting a cigarette.

"No, indeed; our boat may safely defy pursuit," observed Vasco, "even if they should see us and suspect our mission."

"You may well say so. What is the yacht's small boat, with its single rower, even if it be the detective's black giant, compared with this barbed clipper of ours?"

"Hurrah for the red lantern! Aha, that was a lucky trick by which we duplicated the signal agreed on!"

"Rather say forestalled, Vasco. And how would you have managed but for my overhearing the parting words between our fair cousin and her bold detective night before last at the edge of the terrace?"

"True; but if you had knifed him then and there between the shoulder-blades, how much better yet!"

Juan gave an involuntary shudder, which, perceiving the girl's eyes bent upon him, he pretended to be a mimic one.

"Por Dios!" he muttered, half-under his breath; "wait till you've dipped your own hands in the red before recommending the dye-pot so freely for others."

"Don't be angry, Juan; it was only my joke."

"Yes, joke! You can afford it, with Cousin Nessie there for your prospective bride, and your share of mother's recovered jewel-chest to lavish upon the pair of you at will. But as for me, unjustly accused of my granduncle's murder, and with all the minions of the law on my track, to say nothing of this water sleuth-hound, Rowlock Ensco—well, the case is not so charming!"

Juan growled out these discontented words in a mixture of Spanish and English—in which, by the way, most of the colloquy was being carried on, Inez being fortunately familiar therewith, through her thorough knowledge of both.

"Don't be downcast, I say, amigo," urged Vasco, cheerfully. "They have not caught you yet. You haven't thought of how you lost your sapphire ring yet, I suppose?"

Juan was craning his neck to starboard while peering for the detective's red lantern which had ceased to sway to and fro, and was now a mere lurid, slightly moving speck out in the darkness.

"No, no!" he replied, absently.

"Madre de Dios!" and Vasco's voice fell almost to a whisper; "if it should have been picked up in the cabin of the Seamew after—"

Juan straightened himself up in a sort of terrified frenzy.

"Cease your infernal croakings, or we'll quarrel!" he hoarsely interrupted, with a torrent of Mexican maledictions. "Found there? Impossible—preposterous—false!"

"Compose yourself, Juan."

"What! must you forever be suggesting hangman's knots and gibbets?"

"Peste! Nothing of the sort."

"And that, with Ensco, the sleuth-hound of the harbor waves once more on our track? Look out for yourself!"

Vasco obeyed.

"You are mistaken," said he, after a moment's scrutiny. "I cannot see that yonder boat-light alters its position a hair's-breadth."

"Precisely, for the excellent reason that it is heading dead toward us, and at no tortoise jog, either."

Vasco remained silent, while Inez had already marked the truth of this with a joyful heart-leap.

Availing herself of the negligence into which her guards had lapsed, she now sprang forward unexpectedly, seized the red lantern that was poised not far away, and hurled it abroad with all her strength.

It described a bright, crimson arc in the darkness before disappearing.

Juan shouted an imprecation, thrust her back furiously, and half-drew his stiletto.

But Vasco, who had repined the young girl's arms from behind, drew her back, and, laughing gayly, snatched a kiss.

The men at the oars, also, took the liberty of bursting into a coarse guffaw.

"What, Juan," cried Vasco, "are you so apprehensive? Caramba!"

And, releasing Inez, he relieved her of the gag.

But her first use of her liberty was not to scream afresh, as might have been expected.

It was to fetch him such a box on the ear as made his senses swim.

She was red with anger.

"Coward! ruffianly brute!" she hissed, in better Spanish than his own, "you would dare to kiss me? Had I but a weapon! Even that

murder-stained villain"—she indicated Juan—"had not offered me such an indignity!"

And she sunk back scornfully in her seat.

Juan, who had begun to smile maliciously at his brother's rebuff, grew black, though Vasco's good-nature was undisturbed.

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed the latter. "*Carajo!* but there's pith in that shapely arm of thine, cousin mine. God forbid that its fury, though, should outlast our nuptials!"

Inez maintained a disdainful silence.

"It may be well for *you* to laugh!" snarled Juan. "But none the less has the girl's action signaled her situation to the enemy. I give you fair warning, if she yells out, my dagger shall stop her throttle, cousin or no cousin, bride or no bride!"

And he altered the boat's course a point or two, so as to hug yet closer the dangerous swirl of the Gate while making for the west current between Ward's Island and the city shores.

Inez smiled at the superfluity of the warning.

Little need of a signal by scream or otherwise, since it was evident that the first had been so well understood.

Even at that instant a small rocket shot up from the pursuing craft.

Then, for all of her single rower, the steadfast red light in her prow, which was pretty much all that could be distinctly seen of her, seemed to be slowly enlarging.

CHAPTER VI.

THE OVER HELL GATE RACE.

JUAN was as quick to mark the change as Inez. With one of his favorite imprecations he brought a night-glass to bear on the pursuer.

"She has actually hoisted a sail!" he growled, after an ominous pause. "That explains it. *Diablo!* who'd have suspected it in such a cockle-shell?"

He quietly put up the glass, and began to examine his revolver, for he could be cool and deadly enough on occasion.

Vasco followed his example, his white, even teeth glistening between his smiling lips in the light of the remaining lantern, an ordinary uncolored one.

In fact, sharply contrasting the sullen moodiness of the elder twin, the villainy of this young man was invariably tempered by a dare-devil gayety that would not have been without its charm in one of a less notorious and incorrigible viciousness.

"I suppose I have it bred in the bone," said he, lightly, "for my progenitors were no less sailors than soldiers. At all events, be it for life or for death, let me grapple with fate on the running wave!"

And he broke into a bright *barcarolo* in a rich tenor voice.

Juan nodded approvingly.

"I, too!" said he, throwing off his jacket, and baring his sinewy arm to the elbow, while his strong hand opened and shut caressingly on his glistening revolver's stock. "The treacherous sea-water for a fighting ground, and everything equal! I ask for nothing better."

But here there were unmistakable murmurs from the "crew," which had before this manifested some discontent; for it was now the critical tidal moment at the Gate, causing the boat to pitch about dangerously in the boiling waters; while, to make matters worse, she had just undergone a huge "wash" from one of the Astoria ferry-boats, which, with its tall rows of gleaming cabin lights had swept by within near hail on its way to the Ninety-second street dock.

"Be the powers, thin, it isn't meself as agrees wid aither av ye!" dissented the stroke-oar, a beetle-browed, bull-necked professional river-thief of immense proportions.

"Oho!" sneered Juan, contemptuously, with a significant flick of his revolver; "and who asked *your* opinion, Mike?"

"Faix, but it's meself—"

"You'll keep it to yourself till asked for, or the worse for you!" This with a yet more menacing air.

The ruffian was temporarily cowed, but this did not prevent the oarsman next in line, who was quite as dangerous-looking, from taking up the cue.

"Well, for my part," he drawled out, "I'd much sooner be rifling an Indian's lockers, or even robbing a new wharf-cargo, watchman or no watchman, at the moment, than be in this snap, if it's that water-devil, Rowlock Ensco, in yonder ghost-boat that's after us. And you two young gentlemen might as well know it first as last!"

Juan had vainly essayed to quiet him with a stern gesture, and then a quietly murderous look had settled upon his dark face.

Vasco touched his arm as if to enjoin him to patience.

Then his own voice was no longer laughing, but fairly trumpet-like he called out to the bow-oar:

"Jago! be ready to put a bullet into Red Pete's neck at the first sign from me. As for you, Big Mike, bear in mind that you're doubly covered when disposed to fire off that flannel-mouth of yours again. You ought to know us!"

The growing mutiny was thus summarily squelched, though Juan thought it necessary to make a little quiet speech in thieves' latin, with still further effect upon the two grumblers, while Vasco, laughing afresh, gave another snatch of song, that seemed to complete the restoration of harmony, so far as it could be said to exist among such diverse ruffianly elements.

In the mean time the first of the dreaded tide-pots of the Gate had been crossed, with two more to come, so closely were they hugging in to the Ward's Island rocks, perhaps in the hope of luring their small pursuer to her destruction, while the red light was slowly and surely gaining in the chase.

But, in spite of this apparently desperate look of affairs, Vasco threw himself in a careless attitude at the fair captive's side, and endeavored to engage her in a bantering chat.

"Confess now, cousin, how you are longing to be rescued by that devil of a detective back yonder," he laughed, pitching his voice in a soft, musical key, that recalled his comparatively innocent boyhood to her. "Confess it, though little good it may do you, my dear. Ah! *Chiquita mio*, our wharf-rat refuge is not far away. Your detective cannot overhaul us, or he will be killed in the attempt. So, come now, and chat with me merrily, as you used to do when we twins were but seventeen and you not ten. Do you remember the banana-bird song of mine that you used to like?"

And he began to trill it again, a wild and weird little thing, full of tropical conceits and summer sea melody, like an echo of the past.

Notwithstanding her anxieties and resentments, Nessie could not help viewing the young desperado as a sort of enigma.

In the old days, when the familiarity of childhood had swiftly arisen between her and these strange cousins of hers—the handsome but mischievous and devil may-care boy-twins from the Spanish Main, Vasco had always been her favorite, he was so jovial, so ready-witted, so brave and so good-naturedly selfish, in contrast with the brooding somberness of Juan, that grave alter ego of his, in body as in disposition, save for that tiny red arrow of the sinister cheek.

There was nothing he would not do *la chiquita sobrina Inez* (the little cousin Inez,) so he called her, and she even remembered some girlish tears over his incorrigibility at the time of his flight with Juan before the righteous wrath of her grandfather.

And now to what extremities of wickedness had he descended!

She shuddered as she saw him stretched so carelessly there at her feet, singing like a bird, so handsome, so graceful in his half-Mexican costume, and doubtless as lost and as blood-stained as the sterner Juan himself, though perhaps not with the actual murder of her grandfather and his two followers.

She had read of the wild deeds of the Buccaneers, the Marooners, and their Corsair successors of the tropic seas, and the young men strongly suggested such a criminal yet romantic ancestry to her at the present moment in a way that she did not care to dwell on—perhaps for the reason that there was more or less fascination in the idea.

"I wish you wouldn't sing, sir!" said she at last. "It isn't—becoming."

Vasco stopped instantly.

"Of old you did not dislike my singing," he softly protested.

"Of old, you were not what you are," she retorted.

A look that was not good to see flashed over his face.

"*Bueno!* but might you not overlook that if—the detective had not come into your life?"

A disdainful movement was the only answer.

He seized her hand.

"Inez, you are to be mine, my bride forever!" he exclaimed, with sudden fierceness. "Strive not against the inevitable! I have sworn it. It is also my mother's will—Ah! does her mere name make you tremble, then?—it is likewise the will of Fate. Child!"

Crimson with indignation, she was struggling ineffectually to release her hand.

"It must, it shall be so!" he continued, fiercely. "Inez, you are mine! Essay not to oppose the inevitable. Family considerations, the disposition of the jewel-treasure, my own and my brother's security, a hundred complications imperatively demand it. You cannot, you shall not escape! All this apart from my love, my passion for you, *chiquita querida!* It has kindled and mounted throughout the lonely years until it has become a fiery madness in my soul. Inez—Nessie! peerless, beautiful, adored! in accepting, even perforce, this heart, this hand—"

"Away!" she had succeeded at last in flinging him back; her voice was hoarse with terror and disgust; "the one is black with iniquity, the other stained with blood—the blood of my grandfather, to whose murder, wretch, you were at least accessory!"

Vasco's laugh was his retort, but with no gayety now—a terrible laugh!

His face had become as a fiend's—a face sug-

gesting his mother's, and consequently the woman-faced emblem of the emblem in tattoo.

Inez was almost beside herself with nameless apprehensions.

But they were passing through the second tide-swirl of Hell Gate, and at that instant, with a sharp jar, the boat grated on a sunken rock.

Vasco sprang to the neglected tiller, while Juan was on his feet like a flash.

"Back water!" he roared. "Ease her off two points! Curse your mooning folly, Vasco! that was your fault. Ease her off, I say!"

"No use, senors!" growled Jago, shipping his sculls, and then twisting in his seat. "Our bow's stove in, and the whole river's coming in on us."

CHAPTER VII.

THE ROCK STEP TRAGEDY.

"KEEP Mike and Pete to work, at the pistol's point!" shouted Juan.

Then he had fairly scrambled over their shoulders to the bow, jacket in hand, where Jago was already essaying to plug up the rent.

But it was past remedy, for the foot-boards were awash.

Nessie's nerve had unaccountably returned to her, and, with a fortunate spring, she had succeeded in reaching the smooth surface of a rock that projected out of the boiling waters but a few feet away, without even wetting her feet.

The green shore of Ward's Island point was about ten yards distant.

In an instant Vasco was at the young girl's side, leaving the boat with its remaining inmates to settle as it might.

"All's up!" shouted Juan. "Remember the rendezvous at Bowery Bay!"

Then he was dimly seen to leap over the disappearing gunwale, and strike out for the island, in which he was followed by his three companions.

In the mean time, the red lantern of the passing small-boat was bright and distinct, not fifty yards away, and she, obedient to her sail, dancing lightly over the perilous eddies as if possessing a charmed life.

"Inez—Miss Delorme!" it was Rowlock's voice, clear but anxious, trumpeting out of the gloom; "where are you?"

"*Here, HERE!*" she screamed, in an agony of delight. "Here upon a small rock! Haste, oh, haste!"

But, Vasco had grasped her wrist, and his low, fearless laugh sounded hideously in her ears.

"I am here, too; why don't you tell him *that?*" he hissed. "Here, too, *chiquita querida*, and, thanks to Vengeance, with my revolvers dry!"

But her fears were now for another than herself.

"Rowlock, be careful!" she shrieked, as the boat approached. "I am not alone. Vasco is here. He is armed. Look out!"

Vasco had clutched her with a grip of iron. His left hand was over her lips, in his right glistened his revolver ready for instant use on the now distinctly-outlined figure in the bow of the little shallop, just rounding to at the rock's edge, and quivering like a live thing in the swift hesitance of her shifted sail.

A fierce laugh burst from the young Honduran's lips.

"Dog of a detective!" he cried; "think you to sleuth us forever with your cursed cunning, your—"

Piff! A light puff of smoke from the dark figure in the bow, a report, and then Vasco's pistol went off harmlessly in the air as it was dashed from his hand by an unerring bullet striking it in the butt.

"All's over for the present," hissed Vasco, and the next instant he had disappeared headlong in the seething flood.

"Oh, Rowlock, I am so glad—so glad!" and, without thinking of what she was doing, Inez, sobbing hysterically, threw herself in the detective's arms, as he sprang to the rock at her side, after sheering off the boat by a parting kick of his vigorous heel.

A thrill of ecstasy pervaded Rowlock's frame, but he was far too generous to take even an instant's advantage of the situation to express the emotion that almost controlled him.

He turned from the sobbing girl, after composing her with a soothing gesture.

"Quick, Mingo!" he cried. "Little Starlight will hold the boat. *Overboard* after them, and remember, Juan is our chief game!"

The negro plunged over the taffrail, and was off in the wake of the three men who had first taken to the water, Vasco having somehow mysteriously disappeared after his initial plunge.

The detective helped Inez on board the little pinnafe.

"There! you are almost yourself again," he said, with his reassuring gentleness.

"Oh, yes, sir!" she replied, though still trembling. "That is, I think so." And she sunk into a cushioned seat at the stern.

"Look!" he exclaimed. "If any man in the world can make a swimming capture, it is Mingo. Stand ready with a grapple, Starlight! So!" And the boat began to creep inshore.

The person thus oddly addressed was a queer little wizen-faced urchin, in yachting costume, who obeyed orders with a directness and taciturnity that rivaled Mingo himself.

By the starry shimmer that was now upon the waters, the latter could be seen making prodigious progress through the swirling tide, with a formidable jack-knife between his teeth, in pursuit of the three heads that were making for the island shore.

"I—I think they might as well have been let go," stammered Inez, "at least for the present."

"I don't," responded the detective. "Even one of the minor scoundrels, as a witness against the others, might be invaluable to us."

"Ah! but look. Oh, dear, how dreadful!"

The two foremost fugitives had clambered ashore, and disappeared, while the negro had overtaken the hindmost, with whom he was engaged in a terrific struggle.

Suddenly both men vanished beneath the surface.

"Quick, Starlight!" called out Ensco, in a low voice. "There, easy now. No fear of Mingo, in such a tussle."

He was right. At that moment a huge, motionless form, motionless save for the unquiet action of the waves, reappeared on the surface.

It was that of Big Mike, a stiletto still clutched in one listless hand, the knife of the faithful negro buried hilt-deep in the lifeless breast!

"Bad, bad," muttered Ensco. "Better to have had him alive, but it couldn't be helped!"

Here the boat careened a little under a giant grasp on the gunwale, and then the victorious Mingo drew himself in from the water.

"Ugh!" he grunted, shaking himself amidships. "No use, Marse Rowlock."

And, reaching out to recover his knife, he resumed his duties in the management of the boat as if nothing unusual had interrupted them.

Inez shuddered, and she drew her light mantle more closely about her.

"What now?" she asked, noticing that they were heading straight back through the Gate.

"Around the point," was the detective's laconic answer, as he grasped the tiller. "There's a chance, though only a slight one, of our intercepting the others in their attempt to reach their rendezvous at Bowery Bay."

"Ha! you know of that rendezvous, then?"

"I do."

"But might not the officers of some of the institutions on the island there assist in their capture, were you to give the alarm?"

The detective shook his head.

"Scant time for that. There's a boat or two that the scoundrels can have availed themselves of ere this."

This was made apparent as soon as the point had been rounded, for a small boat with two occupants was seen making its way rapidly across the outer reach toward the Long Island shore, with the strong tide in its favor, while there was now nothing but a strong head-wind for the pursuer.

"No good!" growled Ensco. "They'll make the passage in less than ten minutes, and we are not strong enough to follow them into the gang's chief fastness to-night."

And he reluctantly altered the shallop's course.

"What gang is it?" asked Inez.

"The powerful gang of river-bandits who seem to render unquestioning obedience to those scoundrelly brothers."

"Ah! but Vasco must have been left behind, no less than the dead man. There are only two in yonder boat."

"True; let us hope that he also met his doom in the depths."

"Oh, no! Oh, no!"

"But, why not hope it? There would then be but Juan, the master-murderer, left."

"Yes, yes; to hope it—to desire it as just and well! But then, Vasco was always so brave, so venturesome, so desperate, especially on the water, that I cannot think—"

She shrunk down in her seat with a scream.

"Vasco is here!" suddenly burst out a defiant voice, followed by a blood-curdling laugh. "Here to claim his bride, or to dedicate her to his vengeance!"

He had suddenly risen from the water and scrambled over the stern, poniard in hand, like a veritable sprite of the waves.

CHAPTER VIII.

A LEAP FOR VENGEANCE.

ROWLOCK recoiled from the tiller just in time to avoid a vicious lunge of the young bravo's knife over Nessie's shrinking head.

But, as he did so, his revolver leaped into view, and spoke with as cunning precision as on the previous occasion, the bullet snapping the uplifted poniard's blade short off at the hilt.

"Quick, Mingo!" shouted the detective, springing straight at the intruder's throat.

"But remember, alive—alive, at all hazards!"

But he was intercepted by the tiller striking him heavily in the breast, in its release, and he once more went reeling back, while Mingo, agile though he was, was as yet but midway to the stern sheets.

Vasco broke into a terrible laugh.

"Mine in death, if not mine in life!" he yelled, as he caught the shrinking Inez in his grasp, and jumped with her into the waves.

In an instant they had disappeared beneath the surface.

A cry of terror (terror for her,) no less than of fury, had burst from the Harbor Detective's lips, and he was on the taffrail, with his hands joined over his head, his body curved for the pursuing plunge; but a lithe, slight figure—the figure of the little lad Starlight—flitted past and before him like a flash.

"I'm best at water-rattin', Rowlock!" sung out the lad. "Whatcher about?"

And his diving form had cut down through the water like a knife.

Ensco was about to follow when Mingo's massive grasp closed on his shoulder.

He turned upon him in a sort of frenzy, but the ebony face of the African was expressive of nothing but contentment.

"Golly, Marse Rowlock! One's enough. Look; all serene!"

He pointed to where Inez had just re-appeared, lightly buoyed by the partial inflation of her garments, and gasping for breath, but obviously more frightened than hurt.

They had her, shivering, on board without delay, soon to be warmly wrapped up in some old pea-jackets, which the negro produced from a convenient locker.

Then little Starlight also made his re-appearance, scrambling forward, like a half-drowned but uncommonly lively rat, without vouchsafing a syllable of explanation.

The boat was again speedily under management; the spanker filled away, and the altered course was once more resumed, this time without interruption.

Ensco had anxiously searched the surface of the water with his eagle glance, but without detecting the faintest sign of Vasco's showing up again.

He looked tenderly down at the rescued girl.

Exhausted by the repeated nervous shocks she had undergone, and warmly bundled up against the night air, the grateful reaction had come at last.

She had sunk into the brief unconsciousness of a sweet sleep.

The long, bent, silken lashes of the closed eyes rested upon the fair cheeks, the pallor of the beautiful, upturned face was suggestive of deep peace in the still starshine, her soft breathing came and went equably through the slightly parted coral lips, all the more tempting for a pathetic air of weariness, and the uncouth covering just undulated to the slumberous rise and fall of her gentle breast.

The detective gave an inward sigh. How he had come to adore her!

What would he not have given to imprint but one kiss, that would not be unwelcome, on those perfect lips! And his bosom thrilled anew as he thought of how she had nestled in his arms, though but for an unconscious instant of alarm, back there on the wave-washed river-rock.

He removed his lingering eyes only with an effort from their flashing gaze.

"Here!"

And, in obedience to an accompanying sign, the boy Starlight was aft at his side.

"How did you manage?"

"He was a-treadin' water jest under the surface with her sort o' hitched close, boss," he explained, "when I bu'sted him full in the bread-basket. Then he sort o' sheered off, and she popped up'ards like a bladder-fish."

"Have you any notion what could have become of him? Could he have been drowned?"

"Not more'n a Tom cod. That duck was as much at hum under water, boss, as a sculpin or a bull-frog."

"That will do."

The boy rejoined the negro forward.

Some time later Inez opened her eyes, and then started up.

"Where are we?" she exclaimed, after recollecting her bewildered senses. "Ah!" and she took a hurried survey of her surroundings; "you are not taking me home."

"No, but to the yacht, Miss Delorme," replied the detective, reassuringly. "That is best for the present, because the nearest at hand. Be composed, I beseech you!"

"I am no longer discomposed now, thank you."

"That is well. In the mean time, Starlight shall convey to Mrs. Twiggs the tidings of your safety. And, if I mistake not, there are portions of your wardrobe remaining in the after cabin of the Seamew."

"That is true. Thank you again, Mr. Ensco; you are very thoughtful. Doubtless it is for the best. Still!" She shuddered involuntarily.

He understood.

"Ah! you have not been on board since—the tragedy. I had almost forgotten. Perhaps I should land you directly at Astoria?"

"No," with sudden resolution; "I shall have to master the repugnance some time. Why not now? Besides, the dry garments are indispensable."

Her courage was noteworthy, especially in view of what she had so recently undergone.

Nevertheless, it was with difficulty that she suppressed another shudder when she gained the

yacht's deck, a few minutes later, and murmured an acknowledgment of Chief Officer John Dago's respectful greeting.

With one other—Tom Goff, the boatswain, a capital tar—he was the only one of the Seamew's original crew that had been retained; while the detective also had of late made his home chiefly in the yacht.

A commodious state-room, luxuriously furnished, at the after end of the Seamew's saloon cabin, had been occupied by Inez on many a yachting cruise in company with her grandfather.

Now, upon emerging from this, after effecting the desired change of garments, she found the detective thoughtfully awaiting her at the saloon table, upon which some refreshments had been placed.

The young lady's face wore a pleased look, as she seated herself, and began to discuss some of the good things before her, in which, at her pressing invitation, he joined her, while she told him the story of her misadventure from beginning to end.

There was not a single reminder of the terrible tragedy of which the place had been the scene; the entire interior had been charmingly refitted.

Inez testified her appreciation of it all in many ways as she talked. She even grew cheerful, and occasionally laughed happily as she fed a tidbit to the first officer's pretty skye-terrier that was romping about the saloon.

Ensco listened in attentive silence, and then briefly narrated how he had chanced to divine her danger, and had headed so opportunely to the rescue.

"Now let us sift to-night's strange happenings to their bottom," said he, "and see what useful hints for our future behoof we can extract from them."

"Agreed," replied Inez. "But first tell me what you were examining as I approached the table. It flashed like something precious when you were slipping it out of sight."

Ensco smiled.

"I intended to exhibit it later on," said he. "But let it be now."

And he laid before her the sapphire ring he had picked up at the first discovery of the tragedy.

It was so beautiful that she uttered an exclamation as she took it in her hand.

"Be careful how you press the ring in that particular way, please!" hurriedly cautioned her companion. "There is a dangerous secret in the gem."

"Secret—dangerous? Why, what do you mean?" And at that instant the terrier familiarly scrambled into her lap, and pawed out playfully for the trinket.

Suddenly the little creature withdrew its paw with an agonized yelp, and rolled from her lap to the floor, where it fell into convulsions.

Inez was thunderstruck.

"How terrible!" her lip quivered. "Oh, it is horrible! Poor little thing!"

"By the merest accident, though. It is all up with Mr. Dago's pet, I am afraid."

The animal was indeed dead.

"The ring was doubtless Juan's," explained the detective, in answer to the young girl's anguished look of inquiry. "It's secret is a poisoned dart."

She gave a sob of mingled fright and grief, and dropped the ring with a horrified gesture.

CHAPTER IX.

ON THE SEAMEW.

ENSOCO returned to the table after causing the removal of the unfortunate animal's remains.

"Compose yourself, Miss Delorme," said he, cheerfully. "I have explained the mishap to Mr. Dago, who was not inconsolable. He seems not to have cared much for the dog, which was given him by an old messmate only a few days ago. He says you're not to feel worried an instant—otherwise he shall never forgive himself for bringing the little brute on board."

"Forgive himself? Oh, Mr. Ensco, the poor, the innocent little thing! and so playful, so affectionate, only the instant before."

In addition to her quivering lip, the tears were streaming down her cheeks.

With a gesture of dismissing the subject, he took up the ring.

How the rich azure of the stone, with its flashing girdle of brilliants, glanced and scintillated!

Inez clasped her hands, bending forward with redoubled eagerness.

Pet dogs could come and go, wag their tails and die, but such a ring, ah! how seldom is such a feast for feminine eyes.

"To think of its being so fatal, and yet so beautiful!" she murmured. "What is the secret of its deadliness?"

He pressed the thinnest part of the tiny gold band with a peculiar touch. A delicate, bluish steel point, so small as to be just perceptible, darted out from near the central setting, like the tongue of a fairy serpent, and as swiftly vanished back upon the removal of the pressure.

"You chanced upon the secret touch by the merest accident," said Ensco. "Its discovery, however, cost me a good deal of struggle."

"It is Juan's ring, you say?"

"Doubtless. I thought so from the first. Now, from what you tell me of the allusion made to its loss by the twins, I am sure of it."

"You have not told me where and how you found it."

He explained.

"Ah! as a matter of course," she commented. "You should have seen Juan's superstitious panic when Vasco asked if he might not have lost it here, in this cabin, on that fatal night."

"I can imagine it. No wonder," as if thinking aloud. "The ring may be the chief witness in bringing him to the scaffold."

"But could it be proved his property against his denial?"

"Possibly."

"How so?"

"There is an inscription. And he scrutinized the inside of the band."

"What is it?"

"A full name—Zarapatta Martez."

"That woman!" with a shudder.

"Truly. Doubtless one of her wedding gifts, and but temporarily loaned to the elder twin. A fit hand-friend for the White Witch of Morona!"

Inez had fallen into a reverie, her face expressing dissatisfaction.

"What is the matter?" he asked.

"Oh, not a great deal. But was it altogether fair?"

"Was what fair?"

"Your concealment of this discovery from me up to the present time—especially after our compact."

The detective slightly colored, but did not lose countenance.

"I may have been in fault," he admitted, gravely, "but do not condemn me unheard."

"I do not condemn you at all, only—"

"Listen, Miss Delorme."

"You may address me by my Christian name. Are we not comrades?"

He flushed with pleasure.

"Ay; and to the end, Inez. Do not imagine that I have been forgetful of that sacred, that inviolable compact."

"Well, then?"

"You remember how the public detectives pestered you the first days following the tragedy? Their curiosity, their inquisitiveness, their pertinacity? I say nothing of the reporters."

"Remember! Am I likely to forget the ordeal?"

"I should say not. Bethink yourself, then, Inez. In view of our having determined between us to keep our oath-cemented detective-quest solely to ourselves, apart from all outside participation, did not that impertinent inquisition induce you to make one or two admissions that had just as well been left unsaid?"

She colored.

"Candidly, yes; more than one or two, I am afraid."

"Well—"

"Say no more. The justice of your want of faith in me is sufficiently apparent."

"Say not want of faith! You could be discreet enough now, that you have passed through the ordeal. I only waited for you to be fully on your guard."

There was complete forgiveness in the little laugh that broke from her lips.

"What! must the pupil call the master to account?" she cried. "You did just right, I tell you!"

"Thank you!" and his clearing face was good to see.

"But now," she went on, "that there are no more concealments— But wait! am I so sure of that?"

"You can be, on my honor!"

"Well, then, what of this ring, more than it was worn by Juan, and probably stamps him as the master fiend in the horrors of that—that woeful night?"

"More than you think."

"And that is—?"

He bent nearer toward her across the table.

"That the demon-mother of the demon-twins—the Senorina Zarapatta Martez, surnamed the White Sibyl of Morona—is doubtless at this juncture not far away!"

"Ha! you mean it?"

"Yes, and yet more. That she is doubtless here, in this close vicinity; nay, that she is most likely in constant communication with her sons, guiding, counseling, instructing them, and has been from the very first of their reappearance in New York!"

Inez's lips had blanched.

There seemed to be a hideous spell in the mere whisper of this mysterious woman's name.

It was a minute or two before the young girl could ask:

"What are your grounds for this supposition?"

"To mention the chief one will be sufficiently convincing."

"Go on, pray!"

"I cannot as yet tell you of my connection with that woman's past. Its picture-writing" he indicated the arm that bore the mystic emblem in tattoo "will one day be made clear to you. But none the less do I know her of old."

"Yes, yes?"

"Avarice, together with an inordinate, almost morbid, passion for precious stones, is one of the ruling characteristics of the White Sibyl's moody, evil and incomprehensible composition."

"Yes?"

"Well, I am morally certain that she would not part with such a rare jewel as this ring, even to gratify the vanity (or murderous propensity—who shall say?) of her favorite son, for but a brief period, or a special purpose."

"Ah! I begin to understand. Yes, you must be right."

"Wait; there is yet more—the invisible links, of which this glittering bauble is the only thing tangible as yet, may stretch and lead yet further, yet more surprisingly."

"I half-grasp your meaning. But go on. To what conclusion?"

"That she herself may not only have instigated, but actually led in person, the attack that culminated in the secret, midnight assassination of Captain Grant Marston and his two subordinates on this very yacht!"

Inez maintained her composure solely by a strong effort.

"The same appalling thought was dawning in my own mind," she said. "But wait! This, I fear, is going too far."

"How?"

"I have told you what passed between Juan and Vasco while I was a prisoner in their row-boat."

"Certainly."

"Well; from Vasco's allusions, no less than Juan's manner of taking them, I feel certain that the latter must have been the principal in—in—let us call it the Mystery of the Seamew hereafter."

"Agreed as to that. But what you say does not wholly dispose of my theory."

"No?"

"Not altogether. Even in forgetting your presence, they would not be likely to speak of their mother's complicity, or leadership, as the case may be, in such a frightful connection. Besides, Juan might have been likewise present."

"True."

After still further discussing the complications of the case, Inez declared that she must no longer delay her return to her home.

"You notified Mrs. Twiggs?" said she, rising.

"Yes."

"Then you must see me safely back under her protection at once."

CHAPTER X.

THE WHITE SIBYL.

UPON getting once more into the pinnace, Inez surprised the detective, who had begun to head for the Astoria landing, by laying her hand on his arm.

"Not thither," she said, half-hesitatingly. "Straight back across-stream, if you please."

"But the ferry is still running."

"I know it; but I prefer this means."

"Glad you do—with all my heart. Only," as the boat's head was turned, "I should have thought that this evening's adventures would have made you somewhat coy of an open boat."

"Ordinarily it would have been so, but now—have we consulted quite enough as regards our future action, think you?"

"I thought we had, as regards the immediate future, though you must know that I am happy to continue deliberations indefinitely—with you."

"Thank you. There are several things that ought to be clearer between us, I think."

He bowed his head attentively, waiting for her to begin.

Though there was no moon, the starlight had brightened greatly. The shallop was slipping easily through the shimmering water, Mingo and little Starlight—the latter having returned from his errand in time for the duty—sitting silently forward, with but little to do but drowse and dream in the light, steadfast wind that was just bellying the peaceful sail.

"First, Mr. Ensco—"

"Rowlock, or just Ensco, if you please, Miss Delorme. I thought it was a bargain between us."

"So it was. Then why 'Miss Delorme' me?"

"I shan't forget again."

"Neither shall I, Ensco. In the first place, then, as to that rendezvous of the desperadoes at Bowery Bay."

"Yes."

"When are we to make a descent upon it?"

"We?"

"Exactly. I shall personally share all the perils hereafter."

"Ha!"

"Perhaps you do not credit me with the requisite nerve and fortitude?"

"I think you have both."

"Or the necessary cleverness?"

"I know you have that. But—"

"But what?"

"You are a young lady—a beautiful and refined young lady."

"Thank you. But no matter. I hope before

this night is over to convince you quite thoroughly of my proficiency in *camaraderie* as the French would say, no matter how dangerous or how arduous."

"I hope you may, Inez."

"You shall see. Now when is it to be—that descent upon the rendezvous you know?"

"Within twenty-four hours, at the furthest. I shall have to think it over."

"Shall any of the regular police assist?"

Rowlock made an impatient movement.

"Not at my invitation. You know, I have severed even my *quasi* connection with the public Detective Bureau, in order to be perfectly independent and untrammelled in this great sleuth-bunt of ours."

"True; and I am glad to remember it. Who will then accompany us?"

"Dago and the boatswain, together with Mingo and little Starlight yonder, ought to fill the bill."

"Good! You are familiar with the rendezvous, I think you intimated."

"Not wholly familiar; but I know the place."

"What is it like?"

"The rendezvous is a ruinous stone boat-house, about a mile from the new hotel and pleasure-grounds that have been established at Bowery Bay. A wild, desolate place, but approachable by both water and land."

"You think they can have no hint of our intention to surprise them there?"

"We must see to it that they receive none."

"Still, their tricking me with regard to your signal must be remembered."

"Oh, the twins are cunning—cunning as rats there's no denying that. Still, additional precautions are our only safeguard."

"Our main object is to run the twins to earth?"

"To nab 'em—yes, of course. Juan as our prime game; Vasco next; then any one of the satellites most likely to give them away at a pinch."

"And the senorina?"

"We must track her down to her most recent lair. Indeed, that is, after all, our main point. Zarapatta once cornered, the rest would be amazingly simplified."

"You will hold, then, to your theory that she is in or near New York?"

"Certainly; or until it is proved untenable beyond a doubt."

They were now passing under the light-house at the upper end of Blackwell's Island, Ensco having decided, for reasons that will be understood, upon giving Hell Gate a wide berth on the return trip.

Inez gave a little shiver, and then her hands clinched resolutely.

"Oh, if we may only take that terrible woman in the toils!" she exclaimed under her breath.

"You do not fear her then, so much as you did?"

"Far more so, I think. The very thought of her fills me with increased and nameless terror."

"And yet—"

"And yet I would dare any peril, encounter any horror to face her but once on fair terms—to compel the secret that is dearer than my life from her lips."

"Ah, the recovery of the jewel-chest! Yes; next to bringing the murderers to justice, that is the main object."

"You either do not or will not understand."

"Be more explicit, Inez."

"I did not refer either to jewel-chest or vengeance—at least not just then."

The young man bowed his face, that she might not see the troubled look in it.

"Of course I understand," said he, in a low voice. "It is your father and mother you refer to."

"Yes, yes!" she clasped her hands. "Remember my suspense, my anxiety! Is it not natural to me on this score?"

"Must natural, most becoming."

"And think how my grandfather died without divulging the secret of their whereabouts—their mysterious non-existence for me, their daughter—though the revelation was just trembling on his dying lips! But he did say that they are alive—that they are not dead!"

"Ay; but *better* dead!"

He was still not looking up.

"Ensco!"

"Well, Inez?"

"You are a man of mysteries—of a mysterious past."

"You say so, my friend."

"You have confessed as much to me."

"Be it so."

"Apart from our immediate relations in this dreadful murder-quest, in which you are so frank, so confidential with me, you are wholly unknown, wholly an enigma, to me."

"Well?"

"Ensco, you know something of my parents."

"I?"

"Yes; I am sure of it. I feel instinctively that the secret of their absence, their non-appearance, their disgrace, if disgrace it be, is wholly or in part in your possession."

Her voice and manner were wildly beseeching, but he made no answer.

"Look me in the face, Ensko! Oh, why will you not look up—why will you not answer me?"

He did look up, and she was startled at the change that had grown into his face—the face that she had come to love, whose image was daily deepening in her heart—it was grown so sad, so pained.

"Ask me no more," he said, in slow, measured tones. "I cannot, Inez, I must not answer you!"

She made a despairing gesture, that seemed to increase his pain, while it did not shake his resoluteness.

She could not but see this.

"Oh!" murmured Inez; "how unhappy am I! However"—her eyes flashed, her hands clinched anew—"she knows, I am sure of that. And she shall dissipate my aching suspense, terrible and implacable as she is, or she shall die!"

"Poor child! poor Inez!"

"Why do you say that? Tell me this instant, sir! How dare you pity and yet be so unkind to me?"

"I unkind?"

"Yes, in this, unkind, ungenerous! Otherwise would you satisfy me?"

"Inez, you do not, you cannot guess!"

"Indeed, I cannot; that is my misfortune."

"Rather, your privilege. My kindness is in my silence."

"Oh, you torture, you exasperate me beyond words! At least tell me this: does she know?"

"The White Sibyl?"

"Yes."

The answer came slowly, unwillingly, but it came.

"There is nothing concerning you, Inez Delorme, that the Senora Zarapatta Martez does not know."

CHAPTER XI.

THE PHANTOM STEAM-LAUNCH.

THEY were at this moment interrupted by the sudden appearance of a small, swiftly-moving steam-launch that had unexpectedly rounded the light-house point on her up-stream course, and was making directly across her bow.

Glad enough to have the current of her thoughts changed, Inez looked up in surprise.

Though proceeding rapidly, silently, there was not a glimmer of light displayed by the launch, and only a soft, creamy wake followed the almost noiseless revolutions of her propeller.

No more was there any indication of life or intelligence on board, save a single dark-robed figure, sitting like a statue of lonely meditation at the stern.

"Why, how strange, how phantom-like!" murmured Inez. "Did you mark how mysteriously it came slipping and shooting round the point, Ensko?"

"Hush! let us wait." And his voice was oddly measured and expectant.

"Wait for what? But do you mark the solemnity and the strangeness of the thing, I say? Are there phantom steam-launches, no less than phantom ships, I wonder? And that ominous figure at the stern! It looks like a woman's—Ha! Heaven protect me!"

And she was cowering suddenly at her companion's side.

The figure had turned its face toward them, in the full glare of the light-house lamp.

A woman's face, the face as of one long dead, so absolute its marble whiteness! Beautiful, too, but terrible and haunting, with its steadfast, serpent eyes, and every lineament expressive of calm, self-sufficient, baleful power.

It smiled upon them—a glassy, an inscrutable, a deadly smile—and then it was gone.

"Compose yourself, Inez," muttered the detective, and she did her best to obey. "Yes; theory crystallizes into fact, and most unexpectedly."

"No doubt of it!"

"None. It was Zarapatta Martez herself, the White Sibyl of Morona."

Inez courageously controlled one of her shuddering fits.

"Those eyes! that smile! You marked them, Ensko?"

"Why not? Ay; and knew them of old, as well."

"Oh! what can it mean?"

"Time and fate must determine."

"But she must be powerful, able, self-confident, to flit about in this way."

"An enchantress, or very like one."

"And our difficulties, our dangers, are vastly increased."

"No; rather lessened by the actual revelation of this woman's proximity. She has overreached herself—devilry always does that, sooner or later. The true deadliness of her power was in keeping us in the dark as to her proximity."

"True; I see that. But what is to be done?"

"Nothing more than we are trying to do, other than additional caution and cunning on our part. The diamond is cut and polished solely with its own dust. There is a new danger; but say no more of it now."

Inez accordingly relapsed into silence, which was not broken till they were threading the grounds of the Marston House, after leaving Mingo and Little Starlight in charge of the boat, with a parting injunction to watchfulness and caution.

It was past midnight.

After accosting and passing the coachman-patrol, who was still going his faithful rounds, they stood at a side-door of the old house of which Inez always carried a key.

Then it was Ensko himself who first resumed the discussion of the all-engrossing subject in hand.

"I've been thinking everything over," said he. "And less and less do I like the thought of your remaining here."

"Why?"

"It isn't sufficiently guarded."

"The house is almost like a fort."

"No matter. Since what has last occurred—the apparition of that woman—"

"I understand. But where could I be more safe than here, unless it might be on the Seawall?"

"Well, on the yacht, then. It is your own property now, and you are its commander."

"So is this estate mine."

"Still, I can't think you as safe here as afloat."

"I shall remain, though, comrade." And she gave her short little laugh.

He sighed.

"I know what that means," she said.

"What, then?"

"That it would be all right if you could only be always at hand as my defender—be permanently one of the household here, in fact—but that would not be right and proper, in a worldly sense."

Rowlock flushed slightly.

"You have divined aright, Inez," he admitted. "Such was the exact significance of my sigh."

"You admit it?"

"Freely."

"Then apart from the bolts, bars and armed servants constituting my environment, you do not deem me cunning or able enough to guard myself against the enemy here, without your close attendance?"

"Frankly, I do not."

She laughed again.

"I am to prove the contrary to you."

She ran up the steps and noiselessly unlocked the door.

"Follow me, comrade," said she, softly. "According to Coachman John, both Mrs. Twiggs and Sarah, my maid, have long since retired, after being assured of my safety by your considerate message. The other servants are doubtless in bed. We shall have the house to ourselves for my experiments."

He followed her into a dimly-lighted corridor, Inez carefully refastening the door.

Thence he was conducted into a large apartment, which, upon the gas being turned up, proved to be the library—a cosy, substantially-furnished room.

She pointed to the foot of a narrow private staircase in a short adjoining passage-way, and then to a communicating bedroom door.

"That was poor grandpapa's sleeping-room," she exclaimed, "and the library here was his favorite resort. The staircase leads to my own rooms directly above, for nothing would do but I should be within call. Wait now."

She disappeared up the stair.

The detective threw himself into one of the great, morocco-covered arm-chairs, and, while wondering what could be her intention, fell to observing the heavy iron bars of the windows, plainly visible between the partings of the long curtains of crimson rep.

"Inez did not exaggerate," he thought. "The old gentleman made the old house pretty secure against intruders while he was about. Still, what can't an expert, determined criminal work his way through when once thoroughly provided and alert? But I wonder what the young lady can be up to."

A light footfall caused him to turn to the stairway.

Then a sort of sudden, chilling heart-anguish possessed him.

A Mexican youth stood before him, in all the jacketed, silver-buttoned cavalier bravery for which the nationality is distinguished, sombrero in hand, a supercilious curl on the short, delicately-mustached upper lip, a look of challenging askance in the bold, impudent black eyes looking out at him from under a shock of glossy, curling black hair.

"What, señor!" exclaimed the youth; "then you didn't expect the new Mexican cousin—new to you—that the pretty Inez was to send down to you from her rooms?" And then he rattled on at greater length, though in the Spanish tongue.

Ensko had grown very pale.

"No, sir, I anticipated nothing of the sort," he replied, huskily, springing to his feet, and reaching for his hat. "Pray, give the young lady my compliments upon her newly-revealed relative, and say that I wish her joy of him."

A silvery laugh—a familiar one—broke from the young ranchero.

CHAPTER XII.

A TALENTED YOUNG LADY.

THE detective was astounded.

But he had to believe his eyes, if not his ears. For, simultaneously with the rippling merri-

ment, the wig and false mustache had been plucked away, and there was Inez Delorme's smiling and beautiful self revealed before him.

"I give in, comrade!" said Ensko, throwing up his hands. "I, who have made a business of penetrating disguises, even I was thoroughly deceived. Even the tone of the voice was a perfect counterfeit."

"Wait!"

And, with a parting laugh, the real-life actress disappeared again, but not before a flush in her cheeks had apprised him that his sarcastic indignation—in other words, the betrayal of his jealousy—had not been lost upon her.

However, as it had not been a particularly displeased blush, he was induced to take heart.

Inez might have shone on the stage as a lightning-change artist with astonishing success.

Her next appearance was as a rollicking, fair-faced, tow-headed midshipman, in which she not only characteristically blasted her top lights and shivered her timbers to her heart's content, no less than that of her single auditor, but also sung a song and danced a hornpipe with a breezy saltiness of savor that was near to deceiving him once more as to her identity.

Personations of a poor sewing-girl looking for work, an Irish emigrant girl, with the map of Ireland in her face, air and brogue, a boy crossing-sweep, done to the life, and numerous others no less successful, followed in dizzy succession, the characterizations closing with that of a nut-brown Central American peon girl of the beautiful-eyed but vacant-minded mountain variety, that, once seen, is not easily forgotten by the observant tourist.

"Well?"

The performance was at an end and the pilot's granddaughter, in her own proper and graceful character, was waiting for the verdict.

The detective could not abstain from clasping her two hands in his.

"Admirable!" was all he could say.

"You admit, then, that I might pass in a crowd, as a rather expert counterfeit?"

"You are inimitable."

"And could even cheat our arch-enemy at a push?"

"If any one could do that, assuredly you could."

Her countenance fell a little.

"Ah! those frightful eyes that looked out from that death-white face upon us to-night! I doubt if any art, any cleverness could deceive them."

"You may not be put to the test. How did you learn all these tricks of the stage?"

"By study and observation. I used to half-live in one or another of the theaters, along with poor grandpapa. Then, I think, I may have a little natural talent for it."

"Not a doubt of it. And all those costumes?"

She laughed.

"Sarah helped me along with most of them, for I have transmitted some of my enthusiasm into her cockney spirit. But the Mexican and sailor-boy make-ups, they're genuine. That is, they were actually worn by Juan and Vasco when they were boys of seventeen."

"Oh!"

"Pah! how I hate now to mention their abhorred names! It seems to me—it seems to me—"

She had lapsed into a dull, mechanical tone, and a terrified look was growing in her face.

"What is the matter?"

But he had only to follow the gaze of her startled eyes, which was riveted upon the nearest window.

A white face was pressed against the bars, close to the outer panes—a white, sinister face, that vanished as he looked.

But the glimpse was sufficient to explain Nessie's alarm.

"The key, quick!" he exclaimed.

She mechanically tossed it to him, and he was out of the room, out of the house by the side-door, in a flash.

"Don't leave me alone!"

But she was unheard.

He returned in a few minutes, however, gloomy and dispirited.

"Gone! nothing there!"

She did not seem disappointed, having scarcely expected anything better.

"What sort of face was it? I only snatched the nearest glimpse. Not her's?"

She shook her head.

"No, I think not—in fact, I am quite sure. It seemed as formless as it was bloodless, and yet—a man's, not a woman's, face, I should say."

Ensko reflected.

"In spite of all, Inez," said he, "it is as I first said."

"How?"

"You are not safe here."

"But the face was outside the bars."

"What are bars, bolts, double locks, to the genius of crime, the soul of diabolism? By the way, you go armed?"

She produced in either hand a small revolver and a delicate dagger.

"Toys!"

"Excuse me, Ensko. I am not without practice. I could use either upon occasion, and with effect."

"That is well—very well!"

"I am glad to have you say that. Good-night, then! You must go now."

He looked at her with mingled surprise and admiration.

She had suddenly grown perfectly composed.

"When shall I hear from you?" And, receiving back the key, she made a movement to lead the way out.

"Sometime to-morrow—either by Mingo or little Starlight," he replied, but without moving.

"Why don't you come?"

"Can't you guess?"

She looked him in the face, and was silent.

The confession of agonized solicitude, the love, the fear of leaving her alone in the slumbering house, that was written there, was unmistakable.

It was as much a declaration as the one that he could have poured forth in passionate utterance, but would not.

Was she pleased, or angry, or startled?

Slowly the tell-tale color mounted over the pure beauty of her countenance, blotting away its accustomed sweet pallor, as the blush of morn might overspread a lily-surface of some mountain lake.

Then she put out her hand impulsively, and be pressed it to his lips.

"Now will you go?" she repeated, softly.

"Ay, Inez, through fire and flood, to the end of the earth, at your bidding now!"

And he followed obediently, without another word.

After she had let him out, and the door was fastened between them, she paused trembling at the foot of the little stair.

She trembled, the blushes came and went at liberty now—a red republican riot in the lily kingdom of her face—her bosom rising and falling in sweet turbulence, the hand that he had kissed so passionately extended before her glowing eyes.

Then she kissed it herself in the same spot, kissed it repeatedly, after which she fluttered up the stairs, and was gone.

As for Rowlock Ensco, with a heart beating no less exultantly, though after man's wont with a fiercer throb, he first circled about the house with stealthy and observant steps.

He at last encountered Gilbert, the stalwart gardener, who had taken John's place on patrol duty an hour before.

"All serene?" queried the detective, whose goings and comings had become more or less familiar to the domestics.

"Yes, sir; all well," replied the man. "And the coachman reported the same to me."

"Well, keep an extra lookout to-night, Gilbert; and don't forget the whistles I taught you in case of an emergency. I shall be somewhere about."

"I sha'n't forget, sir."

Ensco continued his way toward the river, purposely avoiding the open lawn and keeping to one side, which led over some soft ground amid a shrubbery.

There was no path, but occasional glimpses of turf spaces more distinctly marked by the starlight, or less heavily shadowed by the shrubs and ornamental trees, than elsewhere.

At one of these he came to a sudden pause.

It was a patch of spongy turf, and it bore the fresh imprint of a human foot—a foot that had been incased in a small, aristocratically-shaped man's shoe or boot.

Now, years before, when the Martez twins had been rather conspicuous young men-about-town, they had been somewhat noted, like most Spanish-American youth, for the elegance and diminutiveness of their feet, as the detective had learned, together with other minor details.

This fact instantly recurred to him as he studied the impression before him.

But no other footprint had been left, the soil only being impressionable in that one place; and, save that it was freshly made, and indicated that the owner had been going toward the house—stealthily as a matter of course, or this unfrequented approach would not have been selected—nothing was to be made out of the discovery.

However, was not this a good deal?

Reluctantly leaving the footprint, he reached the boat-landing at last, where Mingo and the boy were found sufficiently on the alert.

Questioned, they were certain that nothing worth reporting had broken the monotony of their watch.

The adjoining street-end had long been wholly deserted; by water or land, not a single incident had attracted their attention.

Ensco leisurely began to pace the adjacent corner of the lawn, intending to watch out the night, if needs were.

Presently he heard the whistling signal he had communicated to the domestic patrols.

CHAPTER XIII.

RESCUED AGAIN.

HE listened again to make sure.

It was repeated, this time unmistakably—three successive notes, long at either end, a short one in the middle.

It was from the further side of the grounds, close to the water front.

With a parting sign to the watchers in the boat, he darted in that direction.

But Gilbert was not on the spot.

Puzzled and angry, Ensco was about to seek him nearer the house, for an explanation, when the signal sounded again.

This time it was from the extreme rear of the grounds.

He hurried thither, but only to find that he had been again deceived.

No one was awaiting him there.

As he ground his teeth, and stood half-bewildered, a low laugh sounded tauntingly at his very shoulder.

He wheeled in a flash, but the utterer, if human utterer it had been, had effected a disappearance yet more swiftly.

He darted into a laurel clump, where the laugh seemed to have retreated in its expiring breath, but there was no one in hiding there.

Satisfied now that he had been systematically duped, he ran toward the spot where he had exchanged words with the gardener-patrol.

His misgivings were justified.

Gilbert lay face-downward in the grass, insensible from a severe contusion on the back of the head.

With some water from an old well, not far away, the detective speedily revived him sufficiently to sit up.

Even then the injured man was too dazed to comprehend inquiries until some brandy was trickled down his throat.

"I must have been knocked down from behind, sir, soon after you parted from me," was the substance of the explanation at last extracted from him. "Suddenly it seemed as if a house had fallen on the back of my skull, I felt the little whistle you had once given me being pulled out of my waistcoat pocket, and then I didn't know nothing."

"Ha! the grounds must be sown with eavesdroppers and spies. Here take another pull from this flask, and try to get on your pins. I shall make the circuit."

With that, Ensco dashed away.

But an observant circuit of the mansion revealed no sign of anything wrong.

Satisfied, however, that there was danger for Inez afoot, he returned to the landing.

Here a signal brought Mingo to his side, while another caused little Starlight to lay off with the boat at a considerable distance from the float.

Accompanied by the negro, Ensco had just turned, with the intention of beating up through the grounds on the Eighty-sixth street side, when something hurtled out of an adjoining clump, and he felt the back of his neck fanned, as by a dashing bolt.

"What was that?" he exclaimed.

"This!" replied Mingo, with an angry grunt.

And he jerked a still quivering bowie-knife out of an adjacent fence, into which it was deeply imbedded.

Ensco mechanically put his hand to the top of his spine, while the African, with a guttural sort of roar, leaped into the clump from which the weapon had been hurled.

The detective followed, but no discovery was made.

At that instant there was something like a stifled cry from somewhere far back.

"Quick!" ejaculated Ensco. "No humbug this time."

They were up and away like a pair of bloodhounds let fly.

Two men, with a white-robed burden between, having just crossed the space between the side of the house and the embankment overlooking the street, were in the act of descending the latter to a large close coach in waiting below.

A neighboring street-lamp lent its effulgency to the uncertain starshine.

The white-robed burden was made out to be a graceful female figure, apparently unresisting and motionless.

But at Ensco's challenging shout, a white hand, with a jeweled flash from the fingers, was waved in mute entreaty.

There was but one other such a hand in the world, so white, so small, so perfectly-shaped—its fellow-member belonging to Inez Delorme.

"Coming! coming!" shouted the detective; and his feet were winged to the rescue, as was no less the sable giant's at his heels.

Were they too late?

Yes; for they were but at the top of the embankment as the captive was thrust into the coach, with a low moan, and a pair of strong arms—but woman's arms, for all that—seized and sunk back with her into the darkness of the interior.

No; for the next instant, and just as the horses were being lashed forward, the Harbor Detective, covered with dust from his hand-spring down to the curb, was wrenching open the door with a grasp that frenzy rendered irresistible.

"No, not too late, for he had even grasped the form of the young girl, and was tearing it out of the woman's arms."

A drawn poniard was in the latter's hand, her

eyes blazed like a basilisk's through her black veil.

"Drive on, *cochero*!" she screamed in Spanish to the coachman; "gallop! run! burn the road with your speed! Jago! Pedro! do you slumber?"

At the same instant she struck full at the detective's breast, but ineffectually through her desire to avoid hurting the girl, while the horses made a great bound forward.

But there they remained, pawing at the air, as if anchored to a hillside.

It might as well have been so, for Mingo, after knocking down the two men, had grasped the hind wheels and, with his feet thoroughly braced was holding the vehicle immovable.

"Stick to it, Marse Rowlock!" he shouted from behind. "I'ze get de bullgine dead to rights."

Rowlock was sticking to it.

But just at that moment he tore himself and his burden out from between the wheels.

None too soon; for simultaneously Mingo was staggered from his foothold by an immense fragment of rock, thrown from behind, striking him between the shoulders, the wheels were torn from his grasp, and the carriage shot on up the street-rise.

As it did so, the unveiled face of its baffled occupant appeared at the coach window.

It was the same face—white, beautiful, powerful, serpent-eyed—that had momentarily revealed itself in the light-house flash from the deck of the phantom-like steam-launch, though now positively diabolical in the intensity of its malevolence and defeated purpose.

"Ensco, beware!" was hissed out at parting. "The picture on your arm—it is but a mid-fight contest, in which the White Sibyl of Morona wins at last!"

Face and voice were no sooner materialized than they were gone.

But the noise of the disturbance had not failed to attract outside attention.

Several policemen were seen running down from the top of the rise, near the East River Park corner.

"Head off that coach!" roared Rowlock, in a stentorian voice. "A crime has been attempted, and the culprit is within."

He had just time to note that the officers were succeeding in heading off and detaining the equipage when Mingo staggered unsteadily up to him.

"What yer gwine ter do now, Marse Rowlock?" he faltered out, bewilderedly.

"What's the matter with you?"

"Spect I war stabbed in the back wiff a bow-sprit, Marse Rowlock. Lor! you don't reckon I'd hev dropped dem wheels without bein' killed, does yer?"

"You're a trump, Mingo! But what has become of those two ruffians?"

"Dunno. 'Spect dey must hev wriggled off to dere snake-holes."

"No matter now. Come with me to the coach. We've got the queen-snake scotched at last."

And still carrying the insensible Inez in his arms, the detective led the way up the street.

The officers had just finished detaining the coach and quieting the horses, while the coachman, an honest enough looking fellow, apparently both frightened and mystified, was already in custody.

Ensco briefly explained the case.

All the officers had recognized him, for he had a sterling reputation behind him.

"Is the young lady injured?" asked one of them, respectfully.

"No; only in a faint," and Ensco glanced down into the sweet upturned face. "She is coming to herself already. But be quick; her would-be abductor is inside."

"Who is it in here?" demanded another officer, and he strided to the coach-door.

"The wickedest, the most dangerous woman in the whole world!" exclaimed the detective, impressively. "God be praised! her career is checked at last."

CHAPTER XIV.

COME AND GONE.

HERE the officer opened the coach-door and unceremoniously thrust his head within.

"No, she isn't! No, it ain't!" he called out, in refutation of the solemn averments of the detective. "The coach is empty. Holy smoke! not by a jugfull, either."

And he darted back to avoid the spring of a large yellow serpent, that darted past him and was gone into a neighboring lot with the rapidity of a cast lance.

"We can't swear that Smith's got 'em this time, sure!" said another policeman. "I saw the varmint myself, and will make my affidavit to it."

"Saw it?" echoed the coach-opener, who was mopping his brow with a trembling hand. "I'd just time to notice it coiled up on the cushion when it jumped full at my throat."

"What can it mean?" asked the third, in an appalled tone.

Ensco, who was now in haste to carry Inez to the house, offered a hurried explanation.

"The Senora Zarapatta Martez," said he, "for that is the name of the dangerous woman I expected to find in the coach, is a tropical woman, and her fondness for such pets used to be well known."

"Pets!"

"Just so. You've had a lucky escape, Smith. It was the yellow adder of Honduras that flew at you—one of the deadliest snakes known."

"But the woman herself?" demanded the roundsman. "Did you see her in the coach, Rowlock?"

"Distinctly. In fact, she aimed a blow at me with a dagger just as I was tearing this young lady out of her grasp—at the moment the horses started up the hill."

"But how could she have escaped?"

"Save your conundrums for your prisoner there—they knock me out. Excuse me now. Mingo here will tell you further particulars while I convey this young lady to her home."

He then hurried away, with his wholly or half-conscious burden still in his arms.

To his astonishment, however, he had no sooner entered the seclusion of the grounds than she quietly released herself from his embrace.

"What!" he exclaimed, joyfully; "you are yourself again."

She was standing half-guiltily before him, her head bowed that her blushes might not betray her.

"Yes," she replied, in a low voice.

"And have been for how long?"

"For some minutes—I hated to have those men see me come to in—in such a ridiculous position."

"Then you saw the snake incident?"

"Perfectly."

"And without crying out?"

"Yes. Why should I have cried out. It was horrible, to be sure; but then I—I felt so safe, so secure, so protected, that—" she could not go on.

But Rowlock went on, and to greater purpose than he had dreamed of an instant before.

She had nestled of her own will in his protecting arms; their fond pressure of her lovely form had been neither offensive nor distasteful.

"Inez, I love you!" he burst forth. "Your image is in my thoughts by day, my dreams by night! Oh, give me the best of all rights to protect and guard you henceforth! I love you!"

Her head was still bent, her figure—the embodiment of perfect grace and rounded symmetry in its white dressing-robe of delicate, clinging material trimmed and festooned with rich lace—strangely agitated in a way he had never marked before.

A great fear came over him—a fear lest he might have lost all in risking so much.

"Have I offended you by my rashness?" he faltered. "Does it shock you to have me say that I love you?"

"N-n-no, not exactly that," was her scarcely audible reply. "In fact, I—I don't particularly dislike it."

Then she raised her face, whose garden of roses was so much more eloquent than words.

Enesco caught her to his heart.

"What! you love me—you love me in return?" he gasped.

She only nestled closer.

"But say it! My life, my fate, my beautiful! let me hear you say it."

Her response was like the far murmurings of a harp of gold, swept by the fingers of fate at the portals of the inmost citadel of love.

"Love you? Oh, my darling! I have done so from the very first."

After the drought the shower, after the shower the rain, after the rain the downpour, the deluge!

Their lips met, and then there were "kisses sweeter, sweeter than anything on earth," as Tennyson sings.

"How did it all happen?" he asked, when they had recovered from their transports.

"What happen—this? I hardly know. It was all your doing, darling."

Another embrace and more kisses.

"No, no; I mean the abduction."

"Oh!"

"You can't have forgotten that."

"I partly did for a few moments."

"What was the first you knew of it?"

"I was just sitting down, after partly undressing, intending to quiet my nerves with a French novel before getting to my rest."

"Yes."

"Sarah hadn't awakened. I could hear her snoring peacefully in the adjoining small room."

"Well."

"Suddenly my room door opened, and two men entered. Before I could call out they seized me, one of them pressing a damp handkerchief over my mouth and nostrils."

"Ha! chloroform."

"Doubtless, or something similar. At all events, I lost my senses."

"Altogether?"

"All was in confusion at first. At one time I seemed to hear you shout, and I tried to cry out, to wave my hand to you."

"Yes; you did both."

"After that all was blank, until—you know when."

"The men—did you get a fair view of their faces before being overpowered?"

"Yes."

"Any recognition?"

"Yes; I dimly recognized them both."

"You recognized them?"

"Yes, as two Spaniards, named Jago and Pedro, who used to visit the twins occasionally when they lived with my grandfather."

"Ha! Creatures of the senorina, no doubt."

"Most likely."

"But how could they have entered the house, secured as it is?"

"I haven't the least idea."

"Let us make an examination."

As it was now near daybreak, they aroused the household upon re-entering the mansion, as being most fit and proper.

An examination proved that access had first been obtained to the roof by means of the lightning-rod, whence the descent into the house had been made by forcing a trap-door.

After that, the side-door on the ground floor near the library had been opened, when the task of the would-be kidnappers had been greatly simplified.

As for the previous mysteries experienced by the detective—the false signals, which had so deluded him, and the incident of the bowie-knife—they were left to conjecture, and nothing that either the gardener or the coachman could suggest threw any light upon the business.

There was an early breakfast, at which Enesco was forced to remain, Mrs. Twiggs no less urgent than Inez in urging it.

Before his departure, he was ceremoniously introduced by the young lady to both the housekeeper and Sarah, the maid, as her prospective husband.

"I'm not astonished one bit," was the good old lady's comment. "My dear Nessie, Mr. Enesco will make you an excellent husband, I am sure. And may the Lord safely see you out of it, say I!"

"See us out of what, Aunt Twiggs?" asked Inez.

"Out of the robbin' an' murderin' an' kidnappin', an' everything! Bless me, my dears! do you really expect to live through it?"

"We'll try to," said Enesco, laughing, as he took Nessie's hand.

"Well, you're not going to get married in a hurry, I hope."

"Not till my grandfather is avenged and the jewel-chest recovered," said Inez, quickly. "On that I am determined."

The detective sighed a little disappointedly, but the justice and appropriateness of her decision were too apparent to be disputed.

"As you will, Nessie; you know best," was all he said.

"I thought it best to make the matter public," she whispered, when bidding him good-by a few moments later. "Now there can be no spiteful or underhanded talk, you know."

He pressed her in his arms.

"That was right," he said. "But—"

"But what?"

"Mightn't we work up our case a little better if married right away?"

"No; but quite the contrary. Your own cooler judgment will tell you so, darling."

"True," he admitted.

"Good-by now. Oh, Rowlock! it tears my heart to part with you now, but it must be. We are both in need of rest and recuperation. Good-by!"

He held out his hands.

"God keep you in the interval!" he exclaimed. "I shall not be far from you. And you will have that trap-door secured without delay?"

"Trust me for that. When shall I have word from you?"

"Probably this evening. But either Mingo or I will be on the watch constantly hereabouts."

As the detective was hurrying toward the boat-landing, where he expected to find Mingo awaiting him, he was overtaken by Nessie's English waiting-maid, Sarah Gubbins, who came running after him with a large well-filled paper-bag.

Sarah was an unadulterated Cockney of middle-age, tall, gaunt and angular, with plain features and a red nose, whose fidelity to her young mistress was only equaled by her good opinion of herself.

"Ere, sir, 'ere you are!" said she, breathless. "Something good to heat, what Mrs. Twiggs thought your assistants might be 'ungry for, you know."

"Thank you," said the detective, gratefully, accepting the package. "I should have thought of asking you for something for them. Take good care of your young lady, Sarah. She is dearer than ever to me now."

He was about to go, but she detained him again.

"I'll remember w'at you say, Mr. Hensco, but 'old 'on a minute, please."

"What is it, my good woman?"

"Well, you see, sir, hafter the 'orriyin' hevents of last night—them 'orrid men as would kidnap beautiful, unpertected young things, ugh!—I naturally, sir, feel more hanxious than bever."

"Naturally enough."

"Tell me, Mr. Hensco, will there still be such awful danger of bein' kerried off out of bed by them awful men, do you think?"

"I think not, with the fresh precautions that will be taken. I think Miss Delorme need not fear another attempt at abduction, at least out of her own rooms."

"Oh, but I didn't hallude to her danger, at hall hevents, not to that alone, you know."

"Ah—oh!"

"You see, I sleep in them same rooms, Mr. Hensco."

"You must sleep more lightly hereafter, then."

"Lord! that's just the 'orror of it, sir. I can't. An w'at if I should be habducted in my sleep, you know?"

Rowlock with difficulty abstained from laughter, and presently made his escape, after leaving the good woman some comforting assurances of a highly complimentary nature.

In a few minutes he was once more on his way back to the Seamew, with Mingo and little Starlight enjoying the provisions he brought them with the best of appetites.

Mingo had reported going to the police station with the officers and their prisoner, the hackman, who had been committed to a cell, though it was the opinion of the sergeant in charge that the man had not been guilty of any intentional wrong-doing.

"So!" said the detective, who had already formed the same opinion.

Subsequent examination proved the innocence of the hack-driver in the affair, and he was discharged, without being able to furnish any clew to the woman who had engaged his services on that occasion.

"Mingo," said Rowlock, "let me take a look at that bowie-knife that so nearly skewered the back of my neck."

The weapon was placed in his hands.

CHAPTER XV.

COMRADES STILL.

A BRIEF examination was sufficient to satisfy the detective.

It was an admirable, though hideously suggestive, weapon, of Mexican workmanship.

Engraved on the buckhorn handle were the initials, "Z. M.," significant of the full name, Zarapatta Martez.

"It may come in use as a companion witness of the sapphire ring," muttered Rowlock, as he clasped the knife and slipped it into his pocket. "Doubtless the poniard, with which the fair Sibyl lunged so thirstily at my heart, would have been similarly inscribed had it come into my possession."

Then he gave a slight shudder at the recollection of his Inez having suffered the contamination of that woman's grasp; though he could not help remembering, also, her anxiety to avoid injuring the girl, to which circumstance alone he doubtless owed his own escape from her fury.

The yacht was reached without further interruption.

The detective was very industrious thereafter, and he permitted three days to elapse before seeking another interview with Inez.

This abstention was not maintained but at the cost of much self-denying violence to his inclinations.

But he thought it for the best in more ways than one, and was, moreover, in receipt of constant reports as to the young girl's security from one or another of his faithful messengers.

However, on the morning of the fourth day he found himself hurrying up the shaded lawn from the boat-landing, with a loudly beating heart, to keep an appointment with her.

As she stepped out from a little summer-house to meet him, he sprang forward with extended arms.

To his astonishment—for they were out of observation—she made a gesture of dissent; though there was nothing but love for him in her eyes and face, which otherwise wore a serious and firm expression.

"Not again, dear!" said she, quietly. "Not again, at least, till—you know when."

"What! no more endearments?"

"Not one."

"Until when?"

"Can you ask? Until our detective-quest is at an end—our oath of comradeship fulfilled."

He made a gesture of acquiescence, after a painful hesitation.

"You are always right, little comrade," said he. "So be it!"

And he merely pressed the hand that was now freely tendered to him.

"It cost me a struggle, too," she observed. "But I knew I was right." "Lover joy, sweet as it is, and work—the kind of work before us—cannot go together."

"Of course, not. I shall have you sometime—God speed the hour!"

"Amen! What news do you bring me?"

"We make the descent upon the Bowery Bay rendezvous to-night."

"So soon? But I shall be ready."

"Do you think you are quite equal to it, as yet?"

"I know I am. Look!" she held out her hand. "Firm as a rock!"

"And lovelier, fairer than a Greek statue's!" She frowned commendably.
 "No more such talk—at least, not yet awhile—or we shall quarrel. But really, I have ceased to have any nerves, at all."

"Or, still better, say that you are all nerve of the right sort."

"That is what I meant."

"You may need it all."

"What are my instructions?"

"You will join me at the Astoria dock at dusk this evening."

"By what means?"

"The ferry-boat."

"So!"

"Yes; and little Starlight will be with you."

"You cannot come for me, then, in the yacht's boat?"

"No; your last adventures were sufficient in that line. Besides, the public ferry will be safer—less room for treachery. After that, you will be with me."

"Good!"

"You had better come in disguise."

"Which of my disguises?"

"As you may determine."

At this juncture there was a suspicious stir outside the summer-house, in which the interview was going on.

Rowlock was out of it in a flash.

"No one there!" said he, returning. "However, let us talk in the open sunlight. After what has happened, I almost feel suspicious of the very air we breathe."

"So do I," said Inez. "Not only walls, but trees and bushes may have ears."

"They acted accordingly."

"You will then meet me at Astoria?" continued Inez.

"What is your plan?"

"It is as yet not wholly determined."

"The attack will be made by boat?"

"Chiefly."

"And I shall accompany it?"

"I can't tell yet. Perhaps, you and Starlight will be sent on as *avant couriers*. Then your disguises would come into play."

"I shall take a selection of them with me."

"That will be well."

"You must have made some discoveries in the past few days."

"A few, and good ones."

"What are they?"

"In the first place, by to-night, or to-morrow at the furthest, I hope to have tracked *La Senorina* to her city residence."

Inez instantly grew more anxious.

"That woman! Thank Heaven, I was not conscious when in her grasp! Had it been otherwise, I fear her contact would have destroyed me."

Or one of her pet snakes, I told you about, might have made your acquaintance. However, she mostly has them in subjection, I haven't a doubt."

Inez drew a long breath.

"What a woman!"

"However, she was earnestly solicitous of your safety, or her dagger might have tasted of my blood."

"Thank God for that! So you told me. You think she secretly resides in the city, then?"

"I am almost sure of it; probably in the annexed district."

"Well, what next?"

"Juan and Vasco continue to cover their tracks admirably. But I have been very careful. My contemplated descent upon their fastness—even my knowledge of its existence—can hardly be suspected by them."

"Oh, may it prove so! And you hope to capture them?"

"Such is my hope—and perhaps the mother, as well. She has been known to visit the rendezvous."

There was a long pause, after which the detective held out his hand.

"To-night, then?"

"Yes; but don't go yet."

"There is no hurry."

And the detective sighed inwardly, he so wanted to take her in his arms, or, barring that, to escape the temptation.

"There are several puzzling things, Ensco, that I wish to ask you about."

"You have but to speak, Inez."

"First, then, how do you account for the Sibyl's strange evanishment out of that coach?"

"I don't attempt to account for it."

"Might she have slipped out on the opposite side, directly after relinquishing me to your grasp, and so made her escape up into the Park grounds?"

"It is just possible. But, as I have said, everything about that woman is simply unaccountable—unknowable."

"Unknowable?"

"For the present, at least. We must content ourselves with being agnostics, so far as she is concerned, until we have her in our very clutches."

"Ah! Heigh-ho!"

"Do not be despondent, however. What next?"

"That woman! Could she have had time to engage in that attempt to abduct me, so soon

after we saw her on the phantom steam-launch as I call it?"

"Undoubtedly; since she *did* engage in it."

"But doesn't that prove that the lawless band, with which she and the twins are associated, must have some nearer rendezvous than Bowery Bay?"

"They have, doubtless, many such; but the successive incidents of that eventful night do not especially prove it."

"Why not?"

"She may have had all the assistance necessary on the launch, and then landed anywhere in this vicinity."

"True."

"What next?"

"Where did you get little Starlight from?"

"From a rather mysterious couple in the vicinity of Bowery Bay. I believe he was a sort of adopted son, but they readily enough adopted him into my service. You may see something of them before long."

"Are they in your interest?"

"Yes; and as true as steel."

"Yet mysterious, you say?"

The detective hesitated.

"Well, but little can be told of their antecedents, you see. The man is a fisherman. Name is Emrold. A queer one, eh?"

"Very. And the boy's, too; though hardly his proper one, of course."

"Starlight? No; I gave him that name, from the queer way in which I formed his acquaintance. I may tell you of it some time."

"You won't forget?"

"Not I. What next?"

"Next and last—this also concerns a name, and is also somewhat personal."

"Indeed! What name?"

"Your own."

The detective winced a little, but then smiled.

"Mine?"

"Yes; of course, Rowlock is not your real Christian name."

"You say so, my dear."

"But is it, now?"

"Don't you like it?"

"Of course I do. But is it?"

"No."

"What is your real given name?"

"Do you think you ought to know?"

"Indeed I do!" This with a sense of proprietorship particularly flattering.

"So do I." A little reluctantly.

"What is it, then?"

"Douglass."

Inez clasped her hands.

"What a lovely name! But I felt certain it would prove so."

"You like it, then?"

"I adore it! Besides, can I forget it in my favorite song?"

"What song is that?"

"You shall hear me sing it often enough after—I mean," with a blush, "some time."

"But what is it?"

"Douglass, Douglass, tender and true."

"Ah! But, by the way, comrade—"

"What now?"

"I wish you would content yourself with Rowlock—at least, for the present."

"Certainly." Though a little disappointedly.

"*Au revoir*, comrade."

"Wait; you haven't told me how you came to be called Rowlock."

"I can't—not now. *Au revoir!*"

They had risen from the tree-encircling garden seat they had been occupying, and stood with their right hands clasped.

"One moment!" persisted the girl. "Somehow I fear to let you go—I dread that something may come between us."

"Inez, my more than friend, my best beloved! Nothing, I think, can come between us more."

There was a hurtling, whistling sound, a swift flash in the bright air, and a bowie knife was quivering in the tree, having passed directly between their faces.

"Again!" cried the detective, with a sort of exasperated roar.

And then he dashed like a tiger into the line of cedar clumps from which the weapon had been unmistakably projected.

Inez was very pale when he returned, shaking his head, and with a troubled look on his brow.

"I can't understand it. By Jupiter! it beats me out!"

And, plucking out the knife, he doggedly resumed his seat.

CHAPTER XVI.

AN EXPEDITION.

His dejection was so great that Inez, though greatly terrified herself, did not venture to disturb him.

Presently, however, as he did not look up, she took the knife out of his hands and examined it.

"Exactly the same pattern of knife as the one launched at me on that eventful night," he muttered. "The design upon the weapon is alone different."

He had sent her word of the former incident, and she eagerly scrutinized the buckhorn handle.

"There is nothing here," she exclaimed.

"Look on the blade."

She did so, and then uttered a startled cry.

"Good heavens! an exact duplicate of the tattooed design upon your arm!"

"Even so."

He took the clasp-knife from her, closed it, and put it out of sight.

"*Au revoir*," and he once more held out his hand.

"But, oh, my friend, my love! this is more than mysterious. It is dreadful—appalling."

"True, my poor child, but what can we do? We can only hope."

"And trust in God," she added, fervently.

Then she gave him her hand, and they separated without another word.

Rowlock did not return directly to the boat that had brought him from the yacht.

Moodily pondering over this last alarming incident, he gained the street, and kept along it till he came to a small German wine-shop, which he entered.

The proprietress, a comely woman, signed him toward a private room in the rear.

Entering this, he found Tom Gaff, the boat-swain of the *Seamew*, evidently expecting him over a glass of something that looked stronger than German wine.

"Ah, sir; I knowed you'd come in season," and Gaff nodded sagaciously as the detective seated himself at the little table.

A likely-looking sailor-man, this Tom Gaff, with a shrewd face, a pair of keen, cold gray eyes, of stocky and powerful build, and for the nonce with but little of the toiling seafarer in his air or dress.

"Well!" demanded the detective.

"Its good goods, sir."

"Then the clew was not a misleading one?"

"Not by a long shot."

"You have located the woman?"

"Yes, sir-ree!"

"Where?"

"At Hunt's Point."

"So near?"

"It's shady, though."

"What sort of a house?"

"No house, at all."

"What?"

"Unless you call a canal-boat a house."

"Give me the particulars."

"I tracked that duck, Jago, what you described to me, to the place. It's one of these here laid-up hulks what's been turned into a dwelling. Jago made sure he wasn't being foltered—that is, he thought he made sure—and then hopped over a long plank, an' disappeared into it."

"What then?"

"Then, pretty soon, some one peeped up out of the hulk."

"Who was that?"

"The woman you warned me of. Ugh!" he gave a shiver, and drained his tumbler. "No mistake, Mr. Ensco. She fairly gave me the aguer."

"Describe the face."

Gaff did so.

"The same!" muttered the detective.

Then he consulted his watch.

"Eleven, scant!"

"Time enough."

"Could we reconnoiter by water, and get back to the *Seamew* by return of tide by the middle of the afternoon?"

"In a racing shell, and with me at the oars, yes."

"Such a one is doubtless procurable. Come!"

"Won't you have a drink with me before we go, Mr. Ensco?"

"No; but as you want another, I'll take aigar."

A racing shell was not to be had, but a club working-boat, almost the same thing, was obtained; and, half an hour later, they pushed off from the float of the Harlem Boating Club.

"Don't forget me, if you have an adventure on hand, Rowlock," called out an athletic, gentlemanly-looking young man from the edge of the float.

It was Wright Vanderlynn, a club member and one of Ensco's acquaintances, to whom he was indebted for the loan of the boat.

Ensco and his companion to a pause, after feathering their oars from the initial stroke, which had not quite carried them beyond hearing.

The former reflected, and then answered back:

"Do you mean one with a spice of danger in it, Vanderlynn?"

"Ay, my boy, that I do! and the more the merrier."

"You know where the *Seamew* lies?"

"At Astoria?"

"Yes."

"Good!"

"Be there at an hour before dusk to-night."

"Is there genuine tough work in prospect?"

This in an eager tone.

"All you want."

"Count me in, and a thousand thanks, Rowlock!"

The sculls caught the water again, and the light craft shot away.

"Chap looked summat like a tea-party swell!" commented Gaff.

"But a capital fellow withal, and the boss fighter of his club," replied the detective. "We're not so many-handed but that he may be of use at a pinch."

They were both in the club working-uniform, thanks to the further kindness of Mr. Vanderlynn—striped shirts, broad white belts and red nomenclatures, with the addition of broad, slouching straw hats—and presently the detective made another pause to add a huge pair of false whiskers, English style, to the side of his face.

"Perhaps it will avail me little in view of such penetration as La Senorina's," said he, "but it won't do to throw away any chance. You are all right without any more fixing," a little enviously, to Gaff.

"True for you!" cried the other, who was pulling stern-stroke. "The cut of my jib, thank the Lord! is as yet unknown to her Highness or the devil-twins."

"Catch stroke!"

"One minute!" and, producing a handy flask, back tilted the sailor's head with its mouth to his lips.

Enesco frowned, but said nothing, though the bottle was one of the otherwise invaluable Tom's besetting sins.

The sculls after this were plied so steadily that in less than an hour they were skirting Hunt's Point.

This is a bold, rather rugged point of land, rapidly being built over, near the confluence of Bronx River with the Harlem, (here beginning to form the island-thronged, gradually-widening neck of Long Island Sound,) and four or five miles from the Third Avenue Bridge.

"There you are!" and Gaff began to ease up. "Lying just under the roadside bluff yonder."

Enesco paused on his oars to observe the spot indicated.

"Oho!" he muttered; "so Madame la Senorina has fitted up that hulk as her secret palace."

"Do you recognize it as an old acquaintance, sir?"

"I should say so. It used to be a beer and eating-saloon, much patronized by road and river sports. Before that—Ah! there is the connecting link of the senorina's present occupancy."

"How so?"

"Well, now I remember that, originally, before it was a decent saloon, the place was an infernally murderous hole, kept by one Garcia, a Spaniard at that, and a common resort of river and harbor criminals."

"Ah, I see. Well, here's luck to the hulk as she blossoms to-day." And back went Gaff's head again, with the flask to his lips.

Enesco lost patience.

"I wish you wouldn't," he said, angrily. "We've too much at stake for you to run any risk."

"But, bless your top-lights, Mr. Enesco, I ain't a-runnin' any!"

"You are, though! The drink has more than once ruined your chances, Tom, and you know it."

Gaff scratched his head, and then, as if under a sudden impulse, tossed the flask overboard.

The detective's brow cleared.

"Come, now, that is something like!" said he, encouragingly.

"Thankee, sir," was Tom's grateful rejoinder, though he added in his own thoughts: "You wouldn't think so, if you knowed as how I'd drained the last drop afore chuckin' the flask away." And he then continued, aloud: "Howsomever, sir, there was inspiration in that last pull I took."

"In what way?"

"It gave me an idea—a reg'lar head-light, Mr. Rowlock!"

"Let me have it."

"A good thing on the senora! Why not boldly board her boat-dwellin' at the water-side door, an' putend as how we take it to be still a beer and lunch crib?"

"Good!"

"Yes, sir! We can be sort of slow to discover our fluke, an' in the mean time mebbe spy into all the old gal's secrets."

"If we get a mere inkling of what Zarapatta Martez would hide from the world, we'll be more than fortunate. However, nothing venture, nothing have. Catch stroke!"

The boat shot on again, this time directed full at the hulk under consideration, less than a mile away.

"Be careful now of your part," cautioned Enesco, as the oars were slipped and moorings made. "The least indiscretion may ruin all."

"Hurrah!" cried Gaff, with assumed heartiness; "beer's my weakness, my boy, and there's lots of it inside, or I'm a horse-marine."

This was well enough, though the detective watched a little nervously his companion's manner in tumbling up over the hulk's side, fearing that his happy-go-lucky air might not be altogether assumed, after all.

But they were in for it now, and, accepting the risks, he followed his companion.

If the outside of the hulk was battered, weather-worn and uninviting enough—which it

certainly was, together with the deck—there was a coquettish little striped awning over the companionway, and a glance down into this revealed a tidiness, and even elegance, that promised greatly for what might lie in the interior beyond.

Above deck, the place was wholly deserted.

"Come on, friend!" cried Gaff, continuing the rollicking role, though Enesco remarked with increased uneasiness that he was really unsteady on his pins. "There used to be beer on draught here, and there must be now. Moreover, I'm as dry as a gun-wad."

And he forthwith blundered down the steps, the other close upon his heels.

But the door at the foot of the companionway was suddenly opened, and they stood confronted by a commanding presence.

It was that of a veiled lady, graceful but majestic, in a light gauzy morning-gown of black lace, the face being hidden, save the eyes—which were large, melancholy and magnetic—by a lace mantilla arranged around the head and bust after the charming custom of Spanish-American fine ladies.

Diamonds could be seen glittering at the throat and ears; the shapely hands were loaded with rings of a like costly setting; and nothing could exceed the mingled courtesy and inquiry of her quiet bearing.

"To what am I indebted for this unexpected visit, senors?"

She spoke in English, though with apparent difficulty, while her voice was indescribably soft and melodious.

"We axes your pardon, ma'm!" swaggered the sailor; "an' I can speak Mexican, if you prefer, since I'm a sea-dog, at your service, with every lingo on the round earth at my tongue's end."

"Quien est, senor?"

Gaff hesitated, smacked his lips, and then reeled off a yard or two of atrocious Spanish with regard to the thirsty errand of the pair.

The lady courteously explained in a few words the mistake that was being made.

"Sad news for thirsty men!" growled Tom, with an ogling look, in spite of Enesco's rebuking hand upon his shoulder. "At any rate, ma'm, we might carry away with us a glimpse of your figure-head, to make up for our disappointment."

"Certano, senors!" And, with a low laugh, she drew back her mantilla.

"The Lord preserve us!" ejaculated the sailor, and he stumbingly recoiled into Enesco's arms; "is it a sea-witch or Davy Jones's wife?"

CHAPTER XVII.

THE SIBYL AT HOME.

TOM GAFF'S excitement and alarm were not to be wondered at, for, though he had once before caught a glimpse of senorina's terrible face, to thus encounter it at close quarters for the first time was to experience a decidedly disconcerting effect.

Terribly beautiful—beautifully terrible—bloodless, yet instinct with life, calm, yet the index of activities—impassive, yet mobile, somber, mysterious, grand, gloomy and peculiar!

Such are the adjectives that would involuntarily arise in the presence of that face, and still would not adequately describe it.

"You must excuse my friend's excitement, madam," said Enesco, apologetically. "He is a rough sailor, little used to the revelation of—of extraordinary feminine charms. I regret the mistake that has been made. We shall take ourselves off at once."

And he bowed, with one hand on his heart, while steadying Tom with the other.

The lady smiled.

"Apologies are unnecessary, and why should you go?" she murmured. "Since I have made my abode in this queer place, similar misapprehensions have not unnaturally occurred."

"You are generous, madam."

"Not at all. Enter, senors. If this is no longer a public house, that is no reason why you should go away without refreshments."

"You're a stunner, ma'am!" cried Gaff, who had by this time recovered his composure. "Thank-ee a million times, for we are dry arter our long pull at the oars."

She smiled again, and forthwith ushered them into a cabin that had been fitted up as a little saloon regardless of expense.

Here she placed before them a profusion of wines and dainties.

"I am, perforce, my own servant at present," said she, as the two men, after a little further urging, proceeded to help themselves. "But you are none the less welcome, senors. You will excuse me from not joining you, I hope, though I shall avail myself of this opportunity to treat my pets to a few tidbits."

She accordingly sunk into an enormous upholstered chair, emitting a soft cooing sound, and instantly became covered with snakes.

They were of all sizes and patterns; they came as if by magic out of the billowy crevices and undulations of the chair; they twined about her arms, her neck, her bosom, the air was filled with their sharp but contented sibilations.

Tom Gaff had just downed his third glass of

iced claret, and had been thinking of trolling out a song in gratitude for so much unexpected hospitality, when this remarkable exhibition took place.

Now he stood as if petrified.

"Great Scott!" was about all he could ejaculate. "Have I got the jim-jams, or am I in a Hindoo snake-charmer's palace?"

"Ah! but you mustn't mind my pets," said the senora, as she began to feed them with spoonfuls of milk. "They are harmless and beautiful. Don't you think them lovely?"

"Candidly speaking, ma'am, I don't," replied Gaff, rapidly opening a fresh bottle and then brimming a tall celery glass with the red wine. "I really don't mean to be wantin' in appreciation, you know, but—well, ma'am, snakes is snakes!" And he forthwith began to toss off the unconscionable bumper.

"And you, sir?" she smilingly turned to Enesco.

"I won't say that I dislike snakes, ma'm—that is, in their place," said he, with becoming suavity. "And as far as snakes go, yours are beauties."

"You are most complimentary. *Presto, vamos!*" At a sudden gesture the serpents disappeared as mysteriously as they had appeared. "You perhaps wonder at me, senors?"

"I don't!" blurted out the sailor, who had again recovered his wind, so to speak. "Why, ma'm, you might turn your party self inside-out now, an' it wouldn't faze me!"

"I'm something of a professional woman," continued the senora, with increased suavity, "and I have my own reasons for making my home in such odd quarters. Would you, senors, like to look further?"

She opened a door invitingly, and they followed.

The saloon in which they had been sitting was at the extreme aft of the hulk, and she now conducted them forward through a succession of compartments and passages, the costly elegance of whose furniture and appointments was a continuous surprise.

At last she admitted them into a narrow passage, richly carpeted, and hung with crimson damask.

Here she paused at the curtained entrance, leaving them standing in the center of the floor, silently wondering what fresh revelation might be in store for them.

"Remain just as you are, or you will break the spell, senors," she cried, in a changed voice. "It is the hour, the fated hour!"

Gaff looked at her with gaping astonishment, Enesco with a swift suspicion.

Her countenance had also changed. It was frightful with a hushed, but concentrated fury; a smile of significant deadliness was frozen upon her lips; the splendor of her large, dilating eyes was instinct with a nameless ferocity; even her person seemed to enlarge and swell with an excess of malign purpose.

Lastly, a large yellow serpent, similar to the one that had escaped out of the coach—long, slender, golden-scaled—writhe silently into view from amid the upper drapery of her dark, cloud-like vesture, and ranged itself about her neck, bosom and arms in gleaming folds and festoons.

A strange spectacle, as fantastic as terrible! and strongly suggesting the line:

And lo, about her, fold on fold,
A golden serpent hung—
An eye of jet, a skin of gold,
A garnet for a tongue!

But Lamia-like as was the general effect, it was absorbed in a single instant by the horrified men, and they had no time to collect themselves before she stamped her foot.

It was a signal.

The damask hangings parted on either side, revealing two ruffians—Pedro and Jago—with cocked revolvers presented.

Both the detective and his companion were unarmed.

They were fairly beset, "covered" from head to foot, hemmed in!

The White Sibyl of Morona burst into a terrible laugh—a laugh so wild, so discordant, so baleful, in contrast with her theretofore mellifluous accents, that it might have rung forth out of the everlasting fire-crypts of the irredeemably lost.

She menacingly held out one of her shapely arms, twined by the golden snake, whose head was raised hissing.

"Dupes and fools!" she screamed, "did you hope to deceive me with your puerile masquerade? Down—down into the depths that give not back their dead!"

The detective sprang toward her, but it was too late.

She had stamped her foot again.

The floor suddenly opened, and the two men were instantly swallowed up from view.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A DAMP SURPRISE.

THEN the floor closed as suddenly over their heads, there was a splash, and the intended victims were floundering in deep water amid intense darkness.

"Be quick!" they heard the senora's voice

exclaim. "Secure their boat by which they came hither. Then be ready to shoot them dead should they dive out under the hulk!"

These words, dimly heard, were followed by the muffled sound of swiftly-retreating footsteps overhead.

"Did you mark that, Tom?" demanded the detective, who was keeping himself afloat with the ease of an expert swimmer.

"To be sure, sir; and may her pet snakes devour her!"

"Follow me, then! It's our only chance."

With that the detective, determining his position as well as was possible, dived down and somewhat to the left.

By good luck, he came up outside the hulk in the clear sunlight, and almost within arm's-length of where the boat, as yet undisturbed, was moored.

In another instant he had scrambled into her, pushed off, and seized the sculls.

Then to get possession of a revolver from his coat-pocket, lying between his feet, was the work of but another moment, and, as Pedro and Jago made their breathless appearance on the hulk's deck, pistol in hand, he had the pair of them covered almost before they could realize the new turn that had taken place in the murderous game.

"Hands up!" he shouted. "Make a single offensive movement, or budge but an inch, and you are dead men in swift succession!"

They obeyed, staring stupidly down at him, while the detective dared not shift his eyes, anxious as he was to know what had become of his companion.

But the latter had come to the surface of the water on the shore side, and was presently seen boarding the hulk from that quarter with the agility and stealthiness of a cat.

Gaff made a gesture, to signify that he comprehended the situation, and at once began to cross the deck, to take the two ruffians in the rear.

At that instant, however, the senorina bounded into view up the companionway.

Her serpent paraphernalia was not on exhibition now—save for the hideous, basilisk luster of her burning eyes.

Her black hair was streaming down her back, in her hand glittered the long dagger with which she had struck at the detective's heart through the coach-window.

But she did not see Gaff, her gaze being held solely by her own satellites and the action of the detective that rendered them petrified from the boat.

"Oafs! cowards!" she hissed, "you have then let him escape? My vengeance upon you!"

"But it wasn't our fault, senora," called back Pedro, though neither he nor his companion dared turn from the menacing revolver's muzzle to look at her. "He had dived under and grabbed the skiff before we could put in an appearance."

"Ay, laggards—snails! and only to hold you now paralyzed at his pistol's point. Ha, ha, ha! However, let him go, if but to meet one of the torpedoes with which my floating fastness is encircled. Strange that he escaped them in his first approach! Where is the scoundrel's fellow-spy?—food for fishes, let us hope!"

Here, with a piratical yell, Gaff crossed the deck in a couple of concluding bounds, hurling the two men head-over-heels into the water.

"Your sarvent, ma'm!" he shouted; "but where are them snakes?"

And with that he, also, had gone over the side head-first, and a moment later had resumed his sculls in the boat with the detective.

"Sheer off, and be careful!" muttered the latter, dropping his revolver to take up his pair of oars. "Remember her words about the torpedoes, though I only half take stock in them myself."

The senora now, with her calmness partly restored, was coolly surveying them from the side of the hulk, while her disheartened bravos were paddling about in the water, chattering like monkeys, and seeking in vain for some means of climbing up the slippery side.

"Adios, senors!" she called out in soft mockery. "Adios, Senor Ensco, more especially! When next we meet, it may be under more favorable circumstances!"

"Pay off there, Gaff, and give no further attention to her," directed the detective, in a low voice. "Look out, or we'll foul that mass of drift-wood. By jove! we have fouled it."

As the nose of the boat, under Gaff's flurried pulling, drove into the mass to be avoided, it must have given a critical jar to some deadly submerged apparatus on which the drift was grounded.

At all events, there was a dull, muffled explosion, and, as the fiendish woman's laugh rung out exultingly, the entire mass sprang high into the air on the crest of a sort of a water-spout.

"Give way!" cried the detective. "Pull for your life, Tom! We're uninjured as yet."

The keen boat shot out and away, luckily escaping the drift-wood shower in its descent, and a moment later was out of harm's way, though half-filled with water, and with its occupants drenched to the skin.

"By Jupiter!" growled Tom Gaff, pausing to

mop his brow and take breath; "it wasn't all gammon about them torpedoes, after all."

"It seems not," said Ensco, and he turned to make a mock gesture of farewell to the senorita, but she had disappeared from view.

"Good Lord, sir! but ain't she the terror?"

"She can hold her own pretty well in that line, I fancy."

"Is she human, think you, sir?"

"Something like it."

"A word now to the police, then, would bag the witch and her hull establishment, snakes included."

"Catch stroke!—Not yet awhile, at all events."

"Why not, sir?" demanded the sailor, while falling to work again.

"Hardly ripe yet."

"Now or never, I should say."

"Wrong! Barring the attempted abduction, there's not a ghost of proof against her as yet on the main issue."

Gaff looked dissatisfied.

"You mean in the murder case?" he asked.

"Yes."

"But ain't actin' like the devil, an' havin' red an' yaller snakes fur messmates, a capital crime?"

Ensco laughed.

"Not quite, Tom."

"Humph!"

"Besides, my man," the detective further vouchsafed, "we've already lost two hours, and we're not to forget to-night's work cut out for us. Strong as is the tide in our favor, I doubt if we shall make the Seamew in good season."

As it was, they reached the yacht a scant hour before dusk, and just as Mr. Wright Vanderlynn was also putting in an appearance over her side.

After resuming his own proper habiliments, the detective first gave that young gentleman an outline of the work in prospect.

Little Starlight was then sent off to act as Miss Delorme's escort, after which Mr. Dago—now the captain of the Seamew, though subject to the detective's orders in a general way—came into the cabin with his report of the preparations throughout the day.

These proved to be generally to Ensco's satisfaction, though not altogether so.

"You reconnoitered the Bowery Bay rendezvous afresh, I suppose?" he demanded.

"Yes, sir."

"With what effect?"

"To all appearance, they've not the slightest suspicion of our intentions. Mr. and Mrs. Emroled are of the same opinion."

"Good! They are in readiness to cooperate with us?"

"Yes."

"You told them of the likelihood of a visit from Miss Delorme?"

"They will expect her."

"How many men do the band mostly muster at the rendezvous?"

"As many as thirty."

Ensco turned with a smile to Vanderlynn.

"And we shall bring six to the attack, including yourself," said he.

The young gentleman stared, but then laughed.

"Odds enough to keep us busy!" he replied, with a yawning stretch of his clinched hands above his head. "Hard knocks and a lively time! That suits me to a T, my boy."

The detective again addressed himself to Mr. Dago.

"Now about the mysterious steam-launch," he went on. "What of her?"

"The yacht commander's face fell a little."

"Well, sir, she remains a mystery," he admitted.

"You tracked her?"

"Yes."

"But with no chance to slip aboard?"

"Not the ghost of one."

"What do you know about her?"

"Two things only. That she is piloted by Jim Farrish, a river-pirate and desperado from far back; and that she's now moored in a little cove just t'other side of Hallett's Point."

Ensco arose.

"I must investigate the steam-launch without delay," said he.

CHAPTER XIX.

IN THE SEAMEW'S CABIN.

VANDERLYNN had also sprung to his feet, and so suddenly as to attract the attention of the others.

His face also wore a startled look.

"What ails you?" asked Ensco.

"Oh, nothing—that is—well," and the young man laughed nervously, "to tell the truth, it just occurred to me, and all in a flash, that it was in this very cabin those ghastly murders took place."

"Of course. By the way, that very arm-chair you jumped out of—it has been newly upholstered since—was doubtless the one out of which old Captain Marston must have sprung to confront his midnight murderers."

Vanderlynn shuddered.

"This is unlike you, my boy," the detective continued. "You're not afraid?"

"Of nothing on earth to my knowledge. You ought to know that, Ensco."

"I do know it; and yet your sudden alarm?"

"I own I'm superstitious," said the young man, frankly. "Though insensible to earthly fear, as I firmly believe myself to be, I have an instinctive horror of the unearthly. I can't help it."

"Is there aught unearthly?"

"Why, don't you believe there is?"

"I am with Montaigne. I believe what I know, or what is knowable. And I repeat, is there anything not of the earth that we, being of the earth, can have any cognizance of?"

"I don't know, perhaps not."

Mr. Dago smiled.

"But all this has nothing to do with the cabin here," he interposed. "Yonder was where the poor old captain gave his last gasps to us. In that corner the poor steward, Mala, the Kanaka, lay dead; while just outside there was the body of brave Jack Hammond, the second officer."

Vanderlynn gave a slight, involuntary shudder.

"But there was nothing unearthly in all these tragic happenings," continued the first officer of the Seamew. "Indeed, they were essentially brutal, and of the earth earthy."

"Admittedly," said the young man, uneasily.

"Still, there's always a haunted feeling about a locality where murder has been done, especially when the murderer has not yet been brought to justice."

"Nonsense, young sir! No more than there should be about any other place—that is, if we look at it in a philosophical way."

"I agree with Mr. Dago," interposed the detective. "Besides, if the murders committed here are as yet unavenged, it is only a question of time when they will be."

"False! false! false!" at this instant rung out a thin, airy voice from nowhere in particular.

Vanderlynn, who had resumed his seat, sprang up as if he had been shot, while Dago and the detective looked surprised and troubled.

Then the first officer clinched his hand, and bounded up the companionway, muttering:

"Trickery somewhere! Let me but fix it upon the right man!"

Vanderlynn followed him.

The only one on deck was Jones, a stalwart young sailor, formerly one of the Seamew's trusted crew, and recently re-employed.

And he was sitting carelessly on the starboard gunwale, humming an air while watching the lights that were beginning to twinkle from the village opposite.

Questioned, he was sure that no stranger had approached the yacht's side, and Mr. Gaff, he was quite certain, was indulging in a nap in his berth.

When they re-entered the cabin it was to find that Ensco had lighted a lamp, by which he was preoccupied with some penciled memoranda.

"I was sure you would make no discovery," said he quietly.

"Why?" asked Vanderlynn.

"Because I recognized the voice as ventriloquial at once."

"Ventriloquial?"

"Yes."

Dago slapped his knee.

"But," continued the younger man, "you also looked startled and troubled, Ensco."

"True; for a new and unexpected difficulty for us was presented. Treason on shipboard, or else a fresh outside trickster not far away."

They reported their questioning of Jones.

"That merely deepens the mystery, and a mystery within a mystery is always a nuisance. Wheels within wheels. Come now, Dago, to return to the steam-launch. Why did you not try to slip aboard of her?"

"Farrish was in view all the time."

"You are acquainted with him?"

"Ay, sir; and he with me. There's the trouble."

"So."

"Yes, sir. And how could I have made overtures to him, without his taking the alarm?"

"True; but he doesn't know me. I shall have a closer look at that launch, as a preliminary, right away. Vanderlynn, suppose you accompany me."

"With all my heart!" Vanderlynn seemed rejoiced to get out of the Seamew's cabin, and stay out.

"You won't go now, sir?" queried the chief officer.

"Why not?" demanded the detective. "The reconnoiter can be made in a quarter of an hour."

"True, sir; but twilight is already falling, and you are expecting the young lady."

"I'll take Mingo, too. With him at the sculls we ought to be back in time. Come, Wright."

They took the yacht's boat, as being roomier than the borrowed club-shell, and were speedily afloat, with the gigantic negro at the oars.

He had just stepped on board from an errand into the village as they had made their appearance up the companionway.

"Don't forget that I'm to entertain the young lady, if she comes in your absence, sir!" called out Dago from the yacht.

Ensco nodded, and then the boat sheered away.

There was still plenty of light, and, as they shot rapidly toward Hallett's Point, the detective imparted to his young friend something of Miss Delorme's anticipated share in the night's undertaking.

Vanderlynn, naturally enough, was both surprised and interested.

"She must be a strange and a bold girl, that young lady," he commented.

"You have never seen her?"

And the detective eyed him narrowly, for, besides being a well-known man about town, Vanderlynn was good-looking, and could doubtless make himself agreeable.

"Never."

"Well, you are right in your guess. Inez Delorme is both strange and brave."

"I should say so. What part can she take in such an affair?"

"She will go on ahead by land, and interview the Emroleds, the odd couple I told you about."

"Alone?"

"No; little Starlight will accompany her."

"Ah, I remember the boy. Still, he is but a boy."

"One in a thousand."

"A boy is a boy."

"Doubtless you would like greatly to take her place?"

Vanderlynn laughed.

"I don't know about that. Miss Delorme is rich as every one knows. But is she likewise young—attractive?"

There was something reassuringly refreshing in both laugh and words.

"Rather," was the detective's dry reply.

"But, apart from all that," said Vanderlynn, earnestly, "is it exactly the sort of a thing for a young lady to engage in?"

"It is Miss Delorme's desire. Besides, Miss Delorme is not like other young ladies."

"Oh!"

Upon reaching the cove—a retired spot—in which the steam-launch lay, not a sign of life was observable on board.

They cautiously rowed around the graceful craft, but, beyond making out her name on the stern, could discover nothing of interest, save that she seemed wholly deserted, without even a sign of fire in her engine.

The name, however, was suggestive.

It was the Ghost.

"She's a beauty!" commented Vanderlynn, as they began to row back, for the twilight was deepening. "With a good head of steam on, she ought to slip through the water like a dolphin."

"And with the silence and stealthiness that her name implies," added the detective. "Do you recognize her?"

Vanderlynn shook his head, after a parting study of the symmetrical craft.

"No; she's new to these waters. I'm sure of that."

When midway back to the yacht, they came to a pause as the Astoria ferry-boat, her decks densely crowded fore and aft with home-returning work-people, was just rounding to as she approached her dock.

At this moment there was something like a scuffle at the edge of her forward deck, and a handsome lad, dressed or looking like a young Cuban, was precipitated headforemost into the river.

Vanderlynn had opportunely gripped him by the collar, and thus saved him from being carried under the wheel, when, amid the confusion that was incidentally taking place on the ferry-boat, little Starlight was seen continuing the scuffle, and apparently trying to spring at the throat of a big man, who was keeping him at arm's-length with some difficulty.

When the little fellow, however, saw that the lad overboard was out of danger, he relinquished his bellicose efforts.

"Look out, Rowlock—it's me!" he piped out.

With that he tossed a bundle down into the yacht's boat, and then followed it himself, alighting so airily, after climbing down and then swinging himself out, as to hardly cause a tremor in the craft.

Vanderlynn had by this time dragged the other lad on board, and, as the big ferry-boat swept on, with a chorus of cheers from her crowds, the yacht's boat tossed and plunged like a chip on her after-swells.

"What does this mean?" cried Ensco, turning angrily upon little Starlight. "Is this the way you obey my orders?"

The boy turned his cud and accomplished his characteristic speculation.

"Betcherlife, boss, an' live it out, too!" he replied.

"Where is the young lady?"

Starlight burst into a laugh, in which he was heartily joined by the rescued lad, who was by this time as thoroughly composed as the other, though naturally more or less moist.

"Oh, boss, but you do sometimes make me tired!" cried Starlight.

The silvery laugh of Inez had already unmasked her to the detective.

"I'm glad you brought away my bundle, Starlight," said she. "It contains my disguises, and a fresh one will be in order before long."

CHAPTER XX.

FRESH ADVENTURE.

It took Vanderlynn somewhat longer than Ensco to realize that the *pseudo*-young Cuban, whom he had dragged out of the water, was none other than Miss Delorme herself.

When he did so his astonishment was immense, if not altogether demonstrative, and she was not so much disguised but that he could perceive how attractive she was.

"Be quick, and wrap this around you!" exclaimed the detective, whipping off his jacket, and handing it to her. "You are dripping wet."

He was secretly not in the best of humor, and would much rather that he, in lieu of Vanderlynn, had saved her from the ferry-boat wheel.

Inez made a gesture of dissent, but, nevertheless, threw the jacket about her shoulders, after laughingly declining Vanderlynn's too ready assistance.

"The weather is so warm!" said she. "But for all that I shall be glad to be dry once more."

"Now for an explanation," said the detective, while Mingo, after a grunt at the odd nature of the detention, was again bending to his work.

Inez's brow became troubled.

"That big man on the ferry!" she exclaimed. "I am sure he jostled me overboard on purpose."

"You bet he did!" cried Starlight.

"You tell the story, Starlight."

The latter did so, though there wasn't much to tell.

After the mischance to Inez, Starlight had accused the big man in question of having purposely occasioned it, and had then attacked him with the result that has been seen.

"For the ferry-landing, quick, Mingo!" exclaimed Ensco, giving the tiller a twist. "We must intercept the rush of the crowd over the bridge. Now, Starlight, we've only three minutes. Describe the big man from head to foot, so that I cannot possibly mistake him."

The lad complied.

A moment later the yacht's boat was at the side of the dock, just as the ferry-boat effected her landing, with the usual rattle of chains, in the slip, and the passengers began to pour out over the bridge and through the ferry-house in a hurried stream.

But at the same instant the detective was out over the dock, like a shot.

He disappeared around the ferry-house, slipped through the rush like a fish through a network of waterflags, and when he reappeared in view of his party, the big man who had been described by the lad was struggling in his grasp.

Inez gave an anxious little cry, while Starlight fairly yelled with delight.

"He's nabbed him, Rowlock's nabbed him!" he cried. "But hallo, mister!" this to Vanderlynn; "help's wanted."

Yes; for at that instant the detective was seen to be suddenly beset by a dozen or more of fiercely-gesticulating foreign-looking men, who were intent upon rescuing his prisoner.

Followed by Starlight, Vanderlynn was out on the dock in an instant.

And then, if Tom Gaff had been on hand as a witness, his doubts as to the young New Yorker's fistic abilities in a general muss would have been quickly put to rest.

He was here, there and everywhere, a veritable prodigy of pugilism, four men biting the dust under his lightning-like shoulder-hitting in such rapid succession as to give the impression that they were little more than men of wood.

But the odds were too great.

Ensco had in the mean time, held on to his prisoner with one hand, while effectively striking out right and left with the other, and little Starlight had heroically upset a man darting between his legs, but the assailants suddenly organized a simultaneous rush, and then all was over.

When the detective and his assistants emerged from the *hors du combat*, in which they had been temporarily placed, the enemy had all disappeared in the dusk, and nothing was to be confronted but a policeman or two and a throng of excited onlookers.

Mingo, whose added energy might have turned the scale of the contest, had tarried behind to make fast the boat, and was consequently on hand too late to be of any assistance.

"I almost had the fellow," regretfully muttered the detective, on the way to the yacht.

"However, I shall know him again."

"Did you recognize him as belonging to the band?" asked Inez, in a low voice.

He shook his head.

No sooner was the deck of the Seamew reached than she snatched her bundle and disappeared.

But when Ensco and Vanderlynn entered the cabin-saloon, a few minutes later, she reappeared from the after compartment in her own character, her costume being an admirably-fitting walking-suit of serviceable material.

Vanderlynn was so struck by the girl's beauty that he could only look and remain silent, which, however, was sufficiently impressive.

The detective on his part, surveyed her with surprise.

"You know that expedition is about to start?" he queried.

"I do know it, comrade."

"You will not go in disguise?"

"To what good?"

"But even I did not see through your last one until you spoke, after being dragged out of the water."

"But the big man, on the ferry-boat, who pushed me overboard?"

Rowlock Ensco knitted his brows.

"True; he must have penetrated it—or some one else for him."

"Probably the latter."

"Did you mark any one observing you?"

"Yes; a tall woman, closely veiled."

"Aha!"

"Little Starlight had just called my attention to her, in a whisper, when the push or scuffle occurred in which I lost my balance."

"That doubtless explains it."

"At all events, I shall enact my part just as I am. Or, in case of great need, I have another disguise—in fact, more than one—with me."

And she made a movement with the bundle, which she still carried in one hand.

Ensco stepped to the door.

"Starlight!"

The boy appeared.

"You have your instructions. Miss Delorme is ready."

Inez stepped forward with unquestioning self-reliance.

"One moment!" continued the detective, with a swift, anxious look.

"Well, Rowlock?"

"I know from the past that neither the senior nor the twins are desirous of working you personal harm."

"Well?"

"Otherwise, you should not go."

Inez laughed, perhaps to conceal the loving look she was giving him.

"Excuse me, my friend," she said, "but, having once made up my mind, I *would* go under any circumstances."

"You would?"

"Ay, indeed, Ensco. I am armed, and the wheels of my destiny shall never roll backward. *Adios, amigo!*"

And, motioning the boy to precede her, she sprung after him up the companionway.

The detective restrained a movement to follow and bring her back.

Then was heard the splash of oars, indicating that the young girl was on her way to the shore.

But Wright Vanderlynn had restrained his open objections to the mission of Inez with even greater difficulty than Ensco had felt.

"It isn't right!" he burst out.

"What isn't?" said the detective, with the utmost coolness.

"Can you ask? Why, the departure of Miss Delorme on such an errand. It is outrageous!"

"Indeed! If you were her escort, it would doubtless be more highly proper."

The young man flushed, but he retained his composure.

"It would certainly be less dangerous for her, Ensco. But you wrong me by those words."

"I would not wrong you."

"Confess that there is danger!"

"To her, or for her?"

"Yes."

"No, I shall not. But, admitting that there is, what of that if she *will* go, and I do not absolutely forbid?"

"You!"

"Yes, I."

"What do you mean?"

"That Inez Delorme is my betrothed."

Vanderlynn's manner instantly changed.

"Good Heavens! forgive me," he exclaimed.

"I did not dream—"

"Of course not, so say no more on the subject."

"Still, are you so sure that our chief enemies would do the young lady no personal harm?"

"Certainly; or she should not have quitted the yacht."

"But that veiled woman on the ferry-boat, and Miss Delorme's misadventure there?"

"I have thought this thing all out, Vanderlynn. There was some misunderstanding between that woman and her agent; or, at all events, if that woman was our chief enemy, as I suppose, it was not by her design that Inez was thrown overboard. Come on deck."

When they reached the deck the Seamew was already under way, heading up-stream, with a light but favorable wind.

The expedition against the fastness of the river-pirates was at last fully on foot.

CHAPTER XXI.

A MYSTERIOUS COUPLE.

DIRECTLY on being placed ashore from the yacht, Inez and her little companion boarded a horse-car for the Bowery Bay Beach, three miles distant, which had only come into vogue the preceding year as a transient summer resort.

"I'll show yer jest when an' where to get out, miss," whispered little Starlight, with a highly

responsible, proprietary air. "You're to take your cue from me."

He rolled his everlasting quid from one cheek to the other, but deferentially expectorated from behind his hand.

Inez had come to like the little fellow, no less than to trust him, and she struggled to hide the amused look that was in her eyes and lips.

"Thank you, Starlight," said she. "I shall not forget that you are my counselor and guide."

"More special," he continued, "if any cuss should hop aboard here, an' attempt to gun you, you're to leave it all to me."

"To gun me!"

"Don'tchersee? To mash yer, you know."

"Oh!" And this time she burst out laughing.

But, Bowery Bay Beach being rather a day than evening resort, there were but few other passengers, and those of a kind apparently little given to gunning or mashing in the sense implied.

When within half a mile of the hotel the pair alighted from the car, and Starlight led the way by striking off into a woodland path that was all but invisible, for the night was cloudy at best.

"This 'ere footpath, miss," the boy exclaimed, "cuts off the swell beach grounds, an' takes us around Bowery Bay Point."

"It is a good thing that you seem to know the way so well," said Inez, courageously keeping at his heels in the little less than solid darkness.

"I oughter, miss. I've knowed it from my fu'st an' earliest youth."

"Oh, dear! and how old are you now, Starlight?"

"Fourteen." And she heard him expectorate with impressive solemnity.

"Bless me! what a retrospect is yours! And have you also chewed tobacco from those remote days?"

His sigh sounded somewhat *blase* in the stillness of the deep wood, broken solely by their rustling footfalls.

"No, Miss Delorme; it's a vice of my later years. Please don't call me a brute, miss."

"By no means—the idea!"

"Besides, I know it to be a beastly habit. I'm knocking off, as it is—sort of tapering down the practice."

"That is good!"

"Yes; I only chew two papers of fine-cut a day now."

"Astonishing! This path leads us directly to the Emroled cottage?"

"Straighter'n a dead shot!"

They presently emerged from the wood, and found themselves near a small cabin, that was perched upon a considerable eminence close to the water's edge.

It overlooked a wide expanse of lonesome water, dotted here and there with islands, all lying peacefully in a soft, opalescent light that shone from the fleecy clouds, although there was no moon.

Inez paused at the top of the eminence, and looked around.

"No sign of the Seamew yet!"

"It ain't time for her," said the boy. "Look!" and he pointed away. "Do yer twig that sort of tumble-down lookin' chebang among the rocks yonder, half a mile away?"

"I don't know. What is a chebang?"

"Crib, ranch, roost, den, buildin'—why, house!"

"Oh! yes, now I see—that ruinous affair at the mouth of a sort of creek, isn't it?"

"Dat's de cheese, miss."

"Well, what of it?"

"It's the pirates' chebang!" explained Starlight, in a hoarse whisper.

"What! the place to be surrounded and attacked to-night?"

He nodded.

Here the door of the cabin opened, and a woman appeared—a still young-looking, but strange and care-worn figure, framed in the outpouring lamplight.

"I thought I heard voices," she said, in a strangely hushed, timid voice. "Is it Miss Delorme?"

"Yes," said Inez, stepping forward, while Starlight, with a cry of, "Mammy! mammy!" rushed before her, like a little child, and threw his arms around the woman's person. "I was expected, then?"

"Oh, yes, miss; for some days, from what Mr. Ensco said. Step in, please; Mr. Emroled will be here presently."

And Mrs. Emroled, while fondling the boy tenderly, never took her eyes off the young woman's face as she ushered her into the cabin.

Inez was making good use of her own eyes, in her turn.

In Mrs. Emroled she saw a much-broken woman of thirty-six or eight, with an abundance of snow-white hair, and the traces of great beauty.

But there was a mysterious shifting expression of the worn face and hollow eyes—apart from the latter's steadfast regard at the present moment—that both mystified and startled the gazer.

"He is very fond of you, and you of him," said Inez, smiling at Starlight's demonstrations.

Mrs. Emroled smiled in return, but it was the saddest smile imaginable.

"Yes," and she absently patted the little fellow's cheek. "Little Starlight was a baby when he first came into our care. Mr. Ensco's taking him away and making a little man of him hasn't made any difference in his affection for us—God be praised!" this last with a wild sort of fervor.

"Have you always called him Starlight?"

"No; Mr. Ensco gave him that name. I suppose it was because of the wonderful starriness of the night when he rescued him from drowning out yonder in the bay." And the woman's arms instinctively closed more tightly round the boy.

"But that was three or four years ago."

"Four last month, mammy!" chirped up the little fellow. "I'd been upset when out clammin'. Lordy! but wasn't the water cold?"

"He was only little Jimmy before that," said Mrs. Emroled, softly; and from an inaudible motion of her lips Inez inferred that "Jimmy" had been a poor foundling.

"Then you have had no children of your own, I presume?" inquired the young girl, gently.

The effect of the question was so painful that she heartily wished that she had not asked it.

"What? I? Oh, no!—that is— Oh, how terrible! the idea!"

The poor woman was so unaccountably overwhelmed that the entrance of her husband was no less a relief to herself than to her visitor.

"George, this is Miss Delorme."

He cast a lightning-like glance of startled curiosity—or so it seemed to Inez—at the young lady, and then, with a surly attempt at courtesy, went to deposit some fishing-nets that he was carrying in the chimney-corner.

"What a very singular couple!" thought Inez, to herself, and she had to confess that Mr. Emroled was more singular-looking than even the wife.

He could have been but little over forty, yet his spare, vigorous figure was partly stooped, as with years; they were doubtless handsome features which his straggling iron-gray beard rendered unkempt and ill-looking; and there was the same shifting, unsatisfied—one might say, absolutely hopeless and despairing—expression in the eyes that distinguished the woman's, only in his there was the addition of a savage, resentful suggestion that was wanting in hers.

After that first look at the young girl, however, he seemed to avoid turning his eyes upon her face.

He had seated himself morosely upon a stool. "The Seamew has just rounded the point," said he, after a long pause.

"That's the talk, daddy!" cried Starlight, looking up from his kneeling position in Mrs. Emroled's lap. "Now what are you goin' ter do? Here we are on hand, as you see."

"That's just it, Starlight," the man went on, in a complaining tone. "I'll help close the back passage of the boat-house, against the river-hounds' escape, just as I promised Mr. Ensco to do. It's a risky job, but I reckon you and I might manage it. But what to do with this young lady, save to leave her here to tremble along with your mammy, I don't know."

Inez made a determined movement. "That you will certainly not do with me, sir!" she said, quietly. "I am here to be of use—to share the danger, if necessary—not to tremble uselessly in any one's company. I have a brave spirit, I am armed"—she coolly produced her revolver—"I demand to be at the front!"

Mrs. Emroled whitened a little, while her husband distrustfully eyed the young girl's skirts.

"Those would be in the way," he growled, indicating them with an impatient gesture. "It's a rough and briery way to the cave-passage to the river pirates' water-fort."

"Is that all? Wait!" Rising, she perceived a communicating door. "You will permit me the use of that inner room a moment?" This to the woman, who wonderingly inclined her head.

"Thank you. I shall be back in a moment." Then she disappeared with her bundle.

When she reappeared, it was as a very charming, but none the less capable-looking, sailor lad.

"Is this any improvement?" she asked, demurely; while little Starlight set up a sort of approving hurrah.

"Humph!"

That was Emroled's sole comment, and he at once began making ready for the expedition by putting on his hat, lighting a dark lantern, and tucking under his arm a long, heavy cudgel.

Inez was the last of the trio to step over the threshold.

As she was doing so, much to her astonishment, Mrs. Emroled caught her in her arms.

"You must not go!" cried the woman, wildly. "There is danger—perhaps unsuspected horror! I cannot let you— Oh, my child, my darling, my beloved! you must not go."

Fearing that the woman was beside herself, the young girl hastily disengaged the straining arms, though not without a considerable exertion of strength.

"Madam, you forget yourself," said she, haughtily. "I cannot account for your extraordinary conduct."

But the woman, who seemed half frantic

with fear, again seized her, and this time imprinted kiss after kiss upon the lovely face.

"I sha'n't let you go!" she wailed. "My God; if anything should befall you!"

"Thanks, that is my own concern. Madam, at another time you shall explain yourself!"

And, again tearing herself free, the *pseudo* sailor-lad had sprung out into the night.

Strange Mrs. Emroled sunk back with a sort of wail, supporting herself by the back of a chair.

Suddenly, however, she uttered a little cry of relief.

Inez had returned so quickly that it hardly seemed she had been gone.

She was no longer angry, but with a troubled, penitent look in her sweet face.

"I don't know why it is, ma'm," said she very gently, "but I am sorry I repelled you so rudely. I—I was never kissed just that way before, and—would you mind doing it just once more?"

The woman caught her to her breast, and kissed her again and again—hungrily and desperately, Inez thought.

Then she would have continued her entreaties, but the young girl would not listen to them.

Again she broke away, and this time did not pause till she had joined Emroled and Starlight, who were awaiting her at the foot of the hill.

As for the lonely, hollow-eyed woman in the house, she had sunk into a seat, and there was now a sort of ecstasy in her face.

"She came back," she murmured, "of her own will she came back, and she kissed me! God be thankful for that, if for never anything more!"

And, sinking down upon her knees before the chair, her trembling hands were joined together, and she prayed in silence.

CHAPTER XXII.

HOLDING THE FORT.

BEFORE the trio of adventure seekers turned their backs upon the water to strike off into a wooded path that crept off from the foot of the hill, they saw the Seamew come into view from around the point, making a very pretty picture as her dark sail caught the gentle wind, of which there was just enough to belly it out smoothly.

"There are not many prettier single-stickers in the world than the Seamew, to my mind," said Inez, as they struck into the path. "I am glad she is my property."

"You ought to be," observed Emroled, curtly. "A beautiful boat!"

"She's a screamer!" cried Starlight, enthusiastically. "Oh, if you'd only belong to a club, Miss Delorme, how the Seamew would paralyze 'em!"

"Not so loud," cautioned Emroled, who was leading, with an occasional gleam from his lantern. "We are approaching the enemy's country."

"There is one thing I can't understand, sir," said Inez, in an obediently guarded voice, after a pause.

"What may that be?"

"How Ensco can hope to take the band by surprise in the Seamew, which is so well known to river men, and on such a night as this, which is by no means a very dark one."

"Ensco is no man's fool."

"I am aware of that."

"But his game is especially deep in acting just as he does."

"That is what I am seeking information about."

"Well, it is just because the yacht is so well known, and is so often seen cruising hereabouts, night and day, that he knows he can count on exciting no suspicion with her."

"Oh!"

"Whereas, if he'd come slipping along in open boats, with all his force plainly visible, it would be a dead give-away from the start."

"Thank you. I understand better now."

"You're welcome, young sailor chap."

"Would you mind," asked Inez, after another pause, "letting me know more particularly what sort of co-operation is expected of us?"

"It's this way: The old stone boat-house, in which the gang meet to divide their river plunder and hatch fresh deviltry, has but two entrances, and consequently but two modes of egress."

"Yes." And at the same time Inez wondered not a little at the other's fair choice of language, considering him a simple East river fisherman.

"The chief of these is by water," continued Emroled, "and thereabouts, at the mouth of the creek, the gang keep moored such of their boats as are too big to be pulled in under the boat-house after them. For you must bear in mind that the greater part is built out over the water."

"I understand."

"Well, it is by that point that Ensco will make his attack, in the hope of bagging the chief game that he is after."

"Yes."

"To enable him to do that, we must block the only avenue of escape by land. This is a cave passage, communicating with the back of the

boat-house, the entrance of which is about thirty yards distant from it."

"Ah!"

"This passage is seldom made use of by the thieves, being only relied on for an unexpected emergency."

"Well?"

"Well," dryly, "it will be a good thing for us if to-night's emergency shall be as unexpected as possible."

"What else, please?"

"Well, we're to hold or block the passage, while Ensco sails in on the scoundrels with his crowd. A rocket from him is to signal us that he has smashed in their boats and cut off escape by water. Then we send up a rocket, to let him know that we have the back door shut. Then the scrimmage, if there is any, begins."

"Thank you, Mr. Emroled. How many men do the pirates muster, think you?"

"From twenty to thirty; to-night about thirty, I fancy—a full quorum, you might say."

"And does Mr. Ensco hope to capture all those ruffians with the few men at his command?"

"Perhaps not; most likely the majority will be laid out or make their escape somehow."

"But isn't there something foolhardy in such an attack, think you?"

"Well," said Mr. Emroled, evasively, "Mr. Ensco just won't call in the help of the regular police. That's the long and short of it, young sailor chap."

Inez began to like Mr. Emroled better than at first.

It was some time before she spoke again, but she did so at last, and more guardedly than before.

"Mr. Emroled?"

"Yes."

"You must be well known, personally, to the river pirates, sir."

"Better than I like to be."

"And they have not molested you, I suppose?"

"No; river thieves aren't often stealing old fish-nets and the like."

"But do you not dread a reprisal from them, after thus assisting in their capture?"

Mr. Emroled coughed reflectively.

"Young sailor chap, George Emroled, though he mayn't exactly look it, has got a knack of taking care of his own skin—on occasion."

This was said in a manner to close the colloquy.

They had been traversing much broken country, with at times the bay in sight, but mostly with rough woods as their surroundings.

Emroled at last held up his hand, as a sign that the utmost caution must be observed.

They at last arrived at the sought-for passage-entrance.

This Emroled and Starlight proceeded to block up as well as they were able by rolling great stones and stacking brushwood into the entrance.

Inez was posted on a little eminence to one side as a sentry, a post which she held, revolver in hand, and with a fast-beating heart.

It was a most unusual duty for a delicately-nurtured young lady to fill, but the excitement called up a lively glow in her veins, and she was not ashamed to confess to herself that she found it to her liking—so far, at least.

From her slightly elevated lookout, she could see the back of the ruinous boat-house—originally a rather extensive structure—and, just beyond, a strip of placid water where the creek came into the river.

There was not a glimmer of light for the house, but an occasional indistinct murmur of voices.

Presently the Seamaw rounded like a beautiful vision into view, her great sail still flowing gently.

A moment later she was hidden by a long line of trees stretching out from the water-front.

Inez stepped back to where her companions were at work.

They had succeeded in blocking the cave-entrance so that but a narrow space for egress remained, and now stood in readiness, Emroled with his cudgel handy, Starlight seated on a rock, and complacently holding a cocked revolver that looked almost as big as himself.

Inez whispered that the yacht had entered the cove.

"All right!" replied Emroled. "Keep your lookout, young sailor-chap. We're ready when they are."

Inez stepped back to her post of observation, which was but a dozen yards away, with a thicket as her near background.

A few minutes later there was a rocket from the water-space just beyond the boat-house.

Emroled instantly responded with one from his position.

Then there suddenly broke upon the night a pandemonium of shouts, yells and curses from the boat-house, as a sufficient indication that the river-pirates were surprised and attacked in their chosen lair.

At first the young girl's heart stood still, then it leaped, while the blood coursed tumultuously in her veins.

"Heaven be with our cause!" she murmured.

"Oh, if both Juan and Vasco be only taken! Oh, if I could only do something!"

The tumult on the water-front, mingled with occasional shots, continued.

Then there was a crashing sound from the passage-entrance, together with some angry cries, that were muffled, as if coming from underground.

Inez felt her blood to be on fire.

She could not resist the temptation to step back and look.

A motionless figure lay at the narrow opening, just stretched out there by a blow from Emroled's bludgeon, curses and oaths were being hurled from the interior, and little Starlight was executing a sort of pigmy war-dance, pistol in hand.

Emroled sternly motioned her away.

"Back to your lookout!" he exclaimed. "It is most important, and be on your guard. Look on every side of you at once, if that is possible."

Inez obeyed.

But, on returning to her post, her eyes were unfortunately only to the front, with no attention to the thicket in her rear.

Suddenly and unawares, from this thicket there crept forth a form, and from this form there was outstretched a pair of hands and arms.

Inez felt like the blooded racer that is ignobly stalled and haltered within sound of the momentous contest in which he cannot share.

Her nostrils quivered, her hand tightened upon the revolver.

"Oh, if I could only do something!" she repeated to herself. "There must be something that I can effect!"

Useless heroics.

And that instant she was helpless in the grasp of that pair of hands and arms—helpless and voiceless.

Her struggles were as vain as those of the woodland fawn in the boar-constructor's folds.

The weapon was torn from her hand.

The dark form, with the *psuedo* sailor youth in its grasp, stepped back into the thicket, without a sound.

Inez had been eliminated from the scene as effectually as if the earth had swallowed her up.

In the mean time Emroled and the boy were having their hands full in defending the passage.

Two other motionless figures were stretched at the mouth of the cave entrance—one from a pistol-shot, the other by a bludgeon-blow—and still were the most fearful oaths and threats poured out from the crowd of desperate and entrapped men of the deep interior.

But the place was intact, no damage was done by the shots now and then fired out of the cave, another rush was not attempted from within, and Emroled, the mysterious Emroled, felt himself the master of the situation.

Presently, however, a shot came, not from within, but from without, and a bullet sung unpleasantly near his head.

"What can this mean?" said he. "Step over to the young lady's post, Starlight, and see what she is up to. Perhaps that was only a random shot from her pistol."

In a moment Starlight returned with the ominous report of the young girl's disappearance.

Simultaneous with this, there were more shots from without, and then two men suddenly sprung upon the passage-defenders from the bosom of the thicket behind.

The boy went down under a crack on the head, but not before his pistol had spoken again with some effect.

Then Emroled was beset by the two assailants, while a fresh one darted out upon him from the cave mouth.

He made a desperate fight to redeem the situation.

But none the less was the breach made at last—the subterranean passage in the hands of the besieged.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE RIVER PIRATES AT BAY.

As the Seamaw rounded into the cove to make the attack, Ensco and his men kept crouched under the bulwarks.

Mr. Dago, at the wheel, was the only man in sight to any jealous or suspicious eyes that might have questioned the apparent peacefulness of the yacht's mission from the shore.

"So far all is well," whispered the detective to Vanderlynn, who was crouching at his elbow. "Look away, and say how many boats you can make out at the mouth of the creek."

Vanderlynn leveled his night-glass over the rail.

"There are four," he replied, after a pause. "A small single-sticker and three light yawls."

"That is well," and Ensco rubbed his hands.

"I doubt if they have taken any boats in under the arch, at all."

"We'll have 'em dead, eh?"

"It looks like it. If we can only stave in those bottoms without detection, we are all right."

"You are sure that the underground passage will likewise be blocked?"

"Quite sure, if Emroled has obeyed my instructions to the letter."

"And the young lady?"

"Don't fret about her. Mrs. Emroled will have kept her back in the cabin out of harm's way."

"I wish we could be dead certain of that," said Vanderlynn, doubtfully.

"Drop it, I tell you!"

"All right."

"The creek is deep, though narrow. Bring your glass to bear again. I want to be sure that the boats in view are all those to be disabled."

Vanderlynn again leveled the glass.

"There's nothing up the creek," he began. "Nothing that I can see. Hold on! By Jupiter! yes there is."

"What do you make out?"

"Look for yourself!"

At that instant the mysterious steam-launch came slipping out of the creek, silent as a ghost, swift as if winged by invisible pinions.

Ensco stared, and there was not a man on the yacht but felt more or less awed.

The launch had been missing from the cove in which Ensco and Vanderlynn had reconnoitered her at dusk, much to the mystification of the yacht's occupants in slipping up the river on this momentous expedition, but not a soul on board had dreamed of meeting her under the present circumstances, when her appearance was doubly ominous, to say the least.

Ensco gritted his teeth.

"If we might only settle with her first!" he muttered.

"Couldn't we manage to board her?" whispered Vanderlynn.

"Impossible! Look!"

Dark, throbless, without a pulsation and with scarcely a streak of foam in her wake, she was shooting past like an arrow.

"There's but one figure on deck," whispered Vanderlynn again. "What! is it a woman?"

"Like enough."

The phantom launch—the Ghost, as she was most aptly named—was hardly studied well before she was gone.

She actually seemed to melt away into the shadow of the shore, without being seen to round the point at all, by which the Seamew had entered the cove.

Ensco drew a long breath.

"The suspicions of the gang have not been aroused," said he, as the voices from the interior of the boat-house were now distinctly heard. "That is the main point."

He signaled Mr. Dago, who gave the necessary order, and the sail was silently lowered, leaving the Seamew lying broadside before the water-arch under the boat-house.

Then Tom Gaff, to whom was deputed the task of disabling the outlying boats, tumbled over the side into the small boat, followed by Mingo and Jones, and provided with augers.

A few minutes later they signaled that the work was accomplished.

Instantly the detective sent off the rocket as a signal to Emroled.

It was answered almost on the instant.

Then a tremendous shout burst from every throat in the attacking party, there was a hubbub of confusion inside the boat-house, with every other indication that the surprise was complete.

A dozen or more heads came peeking out from along the narrow footpaths underneath the water-arch, accompanied by the glistening of arms.

But the Seamew blocked the entrance, broadside on, and the small boat, with its three armed men, and Mingo towering head and shoulders over his companions, began to move in under the arch.

"Surrender!" called out the detective in his ringing voice. "Criminals! we have got you dead. Surrender at discretion!"

"You be hanged!" yelled a voice in response.

Then a broad, flat-bottomed boat, crammed with infuriated armed desperadoes, with Juan and Vasco at either end, darted out from under the arch, there was a series of sharp reports, and the battle was begun.

There were thirty robbers of them, in all, and, considering the disparity of numbers, it was not such a rash attempt, after all, this effort to board the yacht, and fight their way out.

But it was none the less unsuccessful.

Ensco, Vanderlynn and Dago began to pour shots into them from the Seamew's deck, while, on the part of the small boat, Gaff and Jones peppered away without ceremony, leaving the giant Mingo ample room for the sweep of an immense capstan bar, with which, standing upright, with one foot on the low gunwale, he swept the bravo-lined starboard guard of the barge like a besom of destruction.

Juan Martez, it is true—dagger between teeth and revolver in hand—succeeded in getting half over on the Seamew's deck.

But a shoulder-hitting blow in the gullet, from Vanderlynn's trained right hand, sent him flying and writhing back into the bottom of the barge, and not one of his followers had succeeded in following his lead.

Then at this juncture Mr. Dago unlimbered

and brought to bear the yacht's brass signal gun, which had been loaded with old nails and scrap-iron for just such an emergency.

Ensco was still busy with his revolver, so Vanderlynn found opportunity to lend a hand in steadying the little cannon, and depressing the muzzle over the bulwark for the necessary range.

"Look out below there!" roared the first officer, in mercy to the pirates. "We would sooner capture than kill."

And then the gun was discharged, tearing a hole, literally big enough to run a wheelbarrow through, in the bottom of the doomed barge.

There followed a chorus of despairing yells, and the robbers that were able sprung for the side-paths leading in under the arch.

"After them!" shouted Ensco. "The rear passage is secured. Give 'em no time to breathe!"

He leaped into the club-boat, followed by Vanderlynn, while Mr. Dago was alone left to look after the yacht.

Then, although the sunken barge almost blocked up the water-way, both boats pushed in until a foothold was gained for the occupants on the side-paths.

Ensco was the first to bound into the large interior, closely followed by Vanderlynn.

The woodwork of the sort of amphitheater surrounding the inside boat-landing was already ablaze from an incendiary torch, and apparently the last of the gang was disappearing into a gloomy doorway far back in the rear.

"Mingo, Gaff, Jones!" ordered the detective; "quick, off with you around to the cave opening I told you of, or Emroled and Starlight may be overpowered! Follow me, Vanderlynn!"

The three men addressed had disappeared back under the arch, in obedience to the order, and the detective was darting toward the door, when there was a yell of warning.

It was from Vanderlynn.

"Look out!" he cried. "Danger at hand!"

And his own cheek was grazed by a pistol-ball fired by Vasco Martez, who at that instant rose from behind one of the broken benches, his handsome dark face gleam-lit by the conflagration, the dare-devil laugh on his fearless lips.

Vanderlynn snapped a revolver at him in return, but it missed fire.

Casting the useless weapon aside with a muttered oath, he sprang at the Honduran youth with the clinched natural weapons that he used so well.

But Vasco was in under his guard like a flash, with his own hands hooked like claws.

"All right!" growled the New Yorker; "have it rough-and-tumble, if you insist on it."

The next instant they had grappled, stumbled, and plunged splashing into the inner horse-shoe of water, which was very deep, for the tide was at flood.

In the mean time, Ensco had turned at his friend's warning yell, but only in time to receive a blow on the head with a blazing brand in the hand of Juan Martez, who had sprung into view no less unexpectedly than his twin brother.

In Juan's other hand was a cocked revolver.

"Sleuth-hound of a detective!" he hoarsely ejaculated; "serpent doomed athlete! the fiery arrow smites thee from out the cloud at last!"

His eyes were ablaze with maniacal rage, and his face was perfectly bloodless, save for the birthmark arrow on his left cheek, where it seemed to be defined in dazzlingly red outline.

But the detective had staggered back under the blow from the brand, was still reeling waveringly, in fact, and to this he owed his immunity from the pistol-shot that accompanied the youthful desperado's allusion to the tattooed emblem.

As a matter of fact, and by a most wonderful coincidence, the bullet completely ripped up the sleeve of his right arm to the shoulder, thus revealing the mystic emblem in the fierce blaze of the burning room.

Juan started back in momentary suspicious dread.

"An omen!" he gasped. "Por Dios! an omen!"

This gave the detective time to recover his wonted energies.

"Murderer of Grant Marston! assassin of sleeping men! purloiner of the jewel-chest!" he exclaimed, in a terrible voice; "but it is for the scaffold, the hangman's cord, that I reserve thee!"

With that his own revolver spoke out exultantly.

It was that favorite shot of his, and the young bravo's pistol, shattered at the shock, flew out of his hand.

The next instant he was wreathed in the detective's anaconda grip.

But just then an unlooked-for incident favored the Honduran, whose doom might otherwise have been sealed.

Tom Gaff burst into view by the passage door, in a state of excitement that took in nothing of the situation in the blazing apartment.

"All's up!" he roared. "They've escaped—

Emroled and the kid done for—and the young lady dead or carried off!"

As Ensco's grasp on his foe instinctively relaxed at this terrible intelligence, Juan managed to tear himself free.

With a wild laugh, he took a header into the water, diving out in the direction of the arch-entrance.

And at this moment Vasco and Vanderlynn arose, partly separated, from their sub-aqueous struggle.

The former, who had just caught a glimpse of Juan's disappearing form, lost no time in following in his wake, and the next instant had dived out of sight.

Ensco uttered a few words of explanation, and then darted away through the arch, followed by Gaff and Vanderlynn, who had by that time climbed out of the water.

"The yacht first!" shouted the detective, as he ran. "Remember Dago is there alone."

But the yacht and Dago were found to be intact!

"Miss Delorme is gone—perhaps murdered!" then faltered the detective.

"Not so!" cried Mr. Dago, pointing solemnly with his hand. "Look!"

The phantom steam-launch was again noiselessly sweeping by.

Of the two female figures in view on her deck, one was Inez Delorme!

CHAPTER XXIV.

AFTER THE FIGHT.

THERE was no escaping this terrible revelation.

The slighter of the two female figures on the deck of the Ghost was a helpless captive in the other's grasp.

As the phantom launch sped by on her noiseless course, the faces of both were turned toward the yacht, and both were distinctly visible in the spectral opalescent light.

One was mute, pale, beautiful and despairing—the face of Inez Delorme.

The other was calm, bloodless, majestic, exultant—also beautiful, but with the sinister splendor of the fallen angels—the face of the Senora Zarapatta Martez, the White Sibyl of Morona, and mother of the demon twins.

The young girl's lips parted, as if to make an appealing cry.

Before it could be uttered she was slowly, irresistibly folded away into the somber-garmented bosom of her captor.

Silence, but not altogether inaction, had reigned on the yacht.

Ghastly pale with suppressed emotion, Rowlock Ensco had leveled his revolver at the senora.

But, unerring marksman as he was, he yet dared not risk a shot at that evil breast, which had become partly shielded by the inert, passive form of the girl he loved.

His hand fell to his side, and he gave an audible groan.

Then the phantom steam-launch had slipped past.

Headed for the open river, she swept out with her noiseless, fateful speed, and an intervening island quickly hid her from view.

"Nothing can be done at present," muttered the detective.

Here Mingo and Jones made their appearance, carrying between them the insensible form of little Starlight, who had been stricken down by a blow on the head.

"What is your report?" demanded Ensco, turning to Mingo, after the boy had been carried below.

It was simply to the effect that the fugitive robbers had just succeeded in making their escape by the cave-passage, after disposing of Emroled and the boy, as the three men from the attacking party put in an appearance at that point.

The fugitives had taken to the thick woods, rendering pursuit impracticable.

Emroled had also been overpowered and stricken down, but had been able, in spite of severe injuries, to go off without assistance in the direction of his cabin.

Then Ensco spoke.

"My friends," said he, "our expedition, so far as its chief objects are concerned, has ended in grief and failure, and that is all there is to be said. Captain Dago, have Starlight's injuries attended to, and then take such prisoners on board as are lying wounded or disabled on the sunken barge and elsewhere. Then be prepared to start for Hunt's Point on the Harlem, without delay. I shall be with you again at the earliest moment. Vanderlynn, I wish you would go with me to the Emroled Cottage. We must first investigate the particulars as to Miss Delorme's misfortune."

But very little was to be learned at the cabin upon this deeply interesting point.

Mrs. Emroled could only tell of her ineffectual attempts to dissuade Inez from attending her husband and little Starlight on the expedition that had ended so disastrously.

Mr. Emroled, who was beaten black and blue, besides suffering from some severe contusions of the head, could only tell how he had posted the young girl on lookout duty, as taking her some-

what out of the most imminent danger, and of her unaccountable disappearance therefrom.

"But for the young lady's unmistakable courage," said he, "I should have said that she had voluntarily deserted her post through fright."

"She must have been surprised, and carried off," said the detective. "She is now a prisoner in the hands of the Senora Martez."

Mrs. Emroled started to her feet—she had been ministering to her disabled husband's needs—with a half-suppressed scream.

"Don't tell me that—don't!" she cried, clasping her hands. "My darling—that is, Miss Inez, that brave, innocent child—in the hands of that woman! Oh, it cannot be! God would not permit it—it is too, too horrible!"

Both the detective and her husband gave her a quick, startled glance of caution, and she sunk, with a weak moan, at the side of her couch on which Emroled was lying, and buried her face in her hands.

It was all enigmatical to young Vanderlynn, on whom, however, nothing was lost.

Then Emroled alluded to the unexpected attack from outside the cave-entrance, by which Starlight and he had been surprised.

"But for that," said he, "we could have held the passage against double the number that were trying to force it. I had already laid two of them out with my club, and the boy's pistol had brought down another with a shot in the leg."

The detective had knitted his brows.

"That is the key to our defeat—that outside attack upon you," he said. "Even if the reinforcement that rescued you had arrived sooner, I doubt if it would have availed after that."

"Were the men we laid out made prisoners by your men?" asked Emroled.

"No; the fugitive gang must have succeeded in carrying them off."

Before taking his departure, the detective took Mrs. Emroled by the hand, speaking a few consoling words to her that Vanderlynn could not overhear; and also asked if he should send a guard to the cabin from the yacht.

The man of the house shook his head.

"Still," urged Ensco, "you must remember that the ruder elements of the band will now have reason to seek revenge upon you."

Emroled pointed to a shot-gun leaning in the corner.

"That will serve me for *them*," said he, significantly. "As for the ruling intelligences in the band, you ought to know, sir, whether they have most cause to hate or fear me."

The visitors then took their departure, the detective saying as he went:

"Be of good heart, both of you. I shall send you the first news I may receive of Miss Delorme's safety—and, as for Starlight, he shall not want for the best of care and treatment."

"An odd couple!" commented Vanderlynn, on the way back to the yacht.

"Very."

"Have probably known better days?"

"Like enough."

"The woman's interest in Miss Delorme specially intense."

"So it seems."

"Even emotional."

"You think so?"

"Who wouldn't? But what seemed to me particularly mysterious was the woman's regular agony over the thought of Miss Delorme's situation."

"The world is full of mysteries, my friend."

Though by no means satisfied, after this the younger man was prudent enough to hold his peace.

One of the pleasant surprises of their return to the Seamew was the spectacle of little Starlight on deck, with his head swathed almost out of sight in white bandages, but apparently neither his physical health nor his indomitable spirit much the worse for the hard knocks he had undergone.

"They wanted me to keep to my bunk, even after I'd come to myself, sir," he cried to Ensco. "But not much of that soft slop in mine! as I said to Mr. Dago. Hurrah for our side, boss! Take a squint at our prisoners over there in the scuppers."

The prisoners were six in number, all more or less badly wounded, and not one of whom the detective could identify.

There were two dead bodies, however, that had been fished out from under the sunken barge, one of which he recognized as that of the river-pirate, Red Pete, who had been one of Juan's favorite personal attendants.

These were the only bodies that had been recovered, though both Dago and Gaff were of the opinion that several more might be under the river's surface.

Sail was now made without any further delay.

A halt was made at one of the upper New York piers, where the detective placed his prisoners and the dead bodies in charge of the police authorities, with the necessary explanations.

With a favoring wind, the Seamew reached the White Sibyl's strange hulk-dwelling at about three in the morning, but not without very cautiously feeling her way into moorings, in view

of the torpedo experience of the previous afternoon.

But the place was found to be absolutely deserted, notwithstanding that there were abundant evidences of a hasty visit, doubtless on the part of the proprietors, but a few hours before.

Ensco, Vanderlynn and Gaff explored the interior thoroughly, after forcing an entrance.

Much of the finery and even some of the furniture, which had been remarked on the former occasion, had been hurriedly removed.

"If the senora has only taken her snakes with her," said Tom Gaff, "there's a bit of comfort in that."

"Easy things to understand!" exclaimed Ensco, bitterly—and doubtless unconscious of quoting a fragment of the Poet Laureate's "Locksley Hall" in saying so. "She has been here before us, and is doubtless up and away again, with her prisoner, in that demon launch of hers."

"Looks very much like it," said Vanderlynn. "The devil himself couldn't overtake the craft, and she might live more commodiously in the launch than here."

"More of a steam-yacht than a steam-launch," coincided Gaff. "Barring the devil's crew she may carry, I wouldn't back out from crossing the Atlantic with her in summer weather."

"If I could only be sure—if I could only be sure!" repeated the detective, with his eyes restlessly searching the floor of the saloon in which they were standing.

"Sure of what?" queried Vanderlynn.

Here Ensco made a dive into a corner, and returned bearing a strip of red ribbon, with a tag of paper pinned to it.

"A clew!" he exclaimed, triumphantly. "I have it!"

"What is it?" cried Vanderlynn and Gaff in a breath.

Ensco was examining his find under a lamp.

"The ribbon was Miss Delorme's," said he.

"This paper contains some penciled words, in her handwriting!"

CHAPTER XV.

A FRESH CLEW.

THE communication—almost illegible, doubtless either through extreme haste or trepidation—was finally made out as follows:

"ENSOCO:—

"We are here but a few minutes while my captor's minions are transferring some of her effects to the steam-yacht, which she perhaps intends to be my prison un il you can rescue me, or Heaven comes to my relief in some other form. Were it not for you, I could almost wish that it were in the form of death. Alas! I cannot afford you the slightest hint as to our destination. This terrible woman! to what fate does she destine me? And yet she wants to be kind, in her awful way. Will this ever reach you? Heaven knows, or to what benefit, even though it may fall in your hands. But I know you will not rest in seeking for me. That is my sole consolation. I. D."

But for the necessity of his spelling out the foregoing with much difficulty, the detective, in view of its somewhat emotional tone, would scarcely have read it out aloud, or at least without some judicious reservations.

As it was, Vanderlynn eyed him a little jealously as he finished the reading.

"She loves him—him, the detective, the obscure man!" he thought. "Let it be no more denied that the pearl of woman's love is in a wheel, the blindfold drawing of which is the purest lottery! What are my wealth, my position, my sudden but powerful passion for that peerless girl, when the wealth of beauty and heart are so lavishly bestowed upon this nameless detective?"

Vanderlynn was a good, manly fellow for all that, and he none the less made up his mind that he would never willingly look on the dangerous fascination of Inez Delorme's face again.

"Nothing more is to be done—at least for the present," said Ensco, reluctantly. "There is no clew—no trace."

"I wouldn't say that, my friend," said Vanderlynn, energetically. "Nor would I let the matter rest for a single hour."

The detective smiled a little sarcastically.

"Come, then, Vanderlynn," said he, "what is it that you would do?"

"Put the New York police detective force of the whole country, if needs were—on the track of that infernal devil's yacht without delay."

"But if she has left no track—no more than the dissipated foam-bells in her stealthy wake?"

"Oh, the police would manage it somehow! And I would make the matter public anyway."

"Well, I wouldn't," said the detective, coldly; "and, moreover, I shall manage the matter somehow—have no fear of that."

"I hope you may!" this with a slight sneer.

Ensco marked the young man's irritable humor, and penetrated its cause.

He, however, made no reply, but led the way to the deck of the hulk, which communicated with the shore by a long, slender plank.

"Wright Vanderlynn," he then said, after motioning Gaff to return to the Seamew's deck, "if I err not, your participation in to-night's adventures was your own seeking?"

"Correct, my boy," replied Vanderlynn, who

was beginning to feel uneasy, if not wholly penitent, under the other's steel-cold iciness of manner.

"In return for your request to join us," continued Ensco, "I promised you any number of hard knocks—what you athletic club men consider a high old time—did I not?"

"Yes, you did."

"Well, you got them, didn't you?"

"I should say so."

The detective held out his hand.

"Good-by, then," said he. "The morning breaks, but you may get into bed before your aristocratic family are astir."

The young man flushed, and he would gladly have temporized, but there was something altogether new in the detective—new to him, at least—that held him off.

He laughed, nodded, touched the outstretched hand, and then sprung along the gang-plank.

"Snubbed!" he muttered to himself as he gained the road, "teetotally snubbed, and by a detective, too!"

But, as was said before, and was subsequently proved, Wright Vanderlynn was a thorough good fellow, for all, and with his heart in the right place.

There was literally nothing more to be done at that time.

The Seamew accordingly returned to her anchorage at Astoria, word was sent to the Marston residence of the misadventures that had befallen its young mistress, and the worn-out sharers of that night's extraordinary incidents sought the rest and recuperation of which they were in such abundant need.

Though the newspapers duly got hold of the stirring affair with the river pirates, and made sensational reports of the same, without knowing or saying anything about the inside romance of it all, even to the extent of remaining ignorant of the abduction feature—Ensco managed that shrewdly enough—four anxious and suspenseful days passed without the faintest sign or trace of the unknown region into which the demon steam yacht, with her terrible mistress and beautiful captive, seemed to have mysteriously melted.

For once in his life, the Harbor Detective was not only at his wits' end, but almost in despair.

The launch and her inmates could hardly have disappeared more absolutely than if she had suddenly sunk like a plummet into the deepest under-world mountain-gorge of the Atlantic Ocean's imperfectly-mapped, vaguely-sounded bottom.

Ensco was reluctantly thinking that he would have to seek the aid of the regular police detective force at last, and incidentally do what he had heretofore so shrunk from doing—namely, give the painful inside history of Inez Delorme's family affairs to the harsh ordeal of public criticism—when relief came to him from an altogether unexpected source.

It was in the shape of a note from Wright Vanderlynn, dated at Nyack, on the Hudson, in whose neighborhood the young man was spending a few days at his wealthy mother's country place.

It was as follows:

"DEAR ROWLOCK:—After treating the matter to a good dose of sober second thought, I find that I don't retain any hard feelings—however you may feel on the subject—for your rather cavalier manner—perhaps deserved on my part—when we last separated. In proof thereof, here is a secret for you:

"The Ghost is lying in a secluded little cove, called Deep Cove, a short distance south of this place, and not far from an odd little American-Dutch village of same name.

"I made the discovery, while out shooting, by the merest accident, but didn't venture upon any inquiries or investigations.

Yours truly,

WRIGHT VANDERLYNN."

"At last!" sighed the detective, drawing a long breath. "By Jove! I *did* treat Vanderlynn cavalierly, and he is a perfect brick."

Then he hurried to consult over the letter with Mr. Dago.

The latter's face also lighted up as he read it.

"A boon, indeed!" he exclaimed. "And hiding away in such a place, too!"

"You know the cove?"

"Perfectly."

"The particulars, please?"

"Oh, there are not many to give. Deep Cove is about as secluded a corner, or rather cranny, of the Hudson as I know of. I was born within five miles of it."

"West side?"

"Yes?"

"Above or below Nyack?"

"Below, say two miles."

"Best rapid route there?"

"By the West Shore Road."

"What station?"

"Nyack."

"What, and that further on?"

"Yes; the last station this side is five miles distant."

"Describe the cove."

"A gap in the wild river-bank, so narrow as scarcely to be discerned from a passing steam-

er."

"Well?"

"There's where the railroad bridges it, at the narrowest part. Further back the cove widens out, but not greatly, and the water is very deep."

"Anything more?"

"No; just the sort of hole in the cliffs where a yacht might lurk, unsuspected and unquestioned, for a twelvemonth."

"The village near at hand that Vanderlynn mentions?"

"Village! Yes, a blacksmith, a church, and perhaps ten houses and hen-coops. Colonial Dutch from away back. I doubt but the folks speak in Rip Van Winkle Dutch to the present day."

"Good-by!"

"What! off at once?"

"Yes; for secret preliminary investigations. You can get the Seamew ready in an hour?"

"Yes."

"I'll meet you at the mouth of Deep Cove. You ought to be there by daybreak to-morrow."

"Yes, with the south wind holding."

"Make no mistake then."

"Hold on! Won't you take even Starlight with you?"

But Ensco was already getting a few traveling necessities together, for this was in the cabin of the Seamew.

"No; better alone."

"Shall I send word to Mrs. Twiggs?"

"Not a syllable."

"How long will the expedition last, think you?"

"Till we have cut out the Ghost, set Miss Delorme at liberty, and clapped handcuffs on the senorina."

And then the detective was already half up the companionway.

This was late in the afternoon. By dusk he had boarded a West Shore train.

CHAPTER XXVI.

A RAILROAD INCIDENT.

THE detective had calculated that he should reach Nyack in an hour's time.

He would there disguise himself, and hire a team for Deep Cove without delay.

After that he would be governed in his inquiries concerning the ambushed steam yacht by circumstances.

But the mapped-out designs of men, like those of mice, "gang aft agley."

He was not on the train five minutes before he was convinced that he was the object of suspicious watchfulness on the part of four rough-looking, sinister men.

A glance of his eye revealed that they were not strangers to each other, though they wished to appear so.

"I should have donned my disguise before quitting the yacht," he thought, "but there is no help for it now."

The train had just started when he saw Hank Williams, a trusted Express messenger of his acquaintance, passing hurriedly forward.

The man caught his eye at the same instant, and gave him a signal.

A moment later they were in conversation on the forward platform, adjoining the Express compartment of the baggage car.

"You saw those four suspicious-looking men?" asked the messenger.

"Yes."

"What did you think?"

"That they might be spotting me."

"You are on a vital mission then?"

"Yes; but only as far as Nyack."

"You are somewhat out as to the four men."

"Am I?"

"I feel certain of it."

"How so?"

"It is me they are tracking, not you."

"Ah!"

"One of them has been dodging me all the way from the office: the others joined him at the depot."

"Indeed!" And Ensco felt comparatively relieved on his own account.

"Will you stand by me at a pinch, old fellow?" was the messenger's next question.

"I should say so."

"Come with me into my car, then. I am carrying a larger amount for the company than usual, and naturally feel a little nervous."

He opened the door of the Express car with his key as he spoke, and they entered it.

"You can go now," said the messenger to a trainman, who was keeping guard over the safe. "I shall make it right with you before we separate."

He let the man out by the same door, and then carefully locked it.

Besides the burglar-proof safe, there were some few kegs and chests in the compartment, which had sliding side-doors, like those of the adjoining baggage-car.

One of these side-doors, the one looking out over the river, was open, the evening being sultry.

The car also contained some chairs and a small table, and the messenger speedily produced a bottle and two glasses.

"Let us be comfortable," said he, as the two seated themselves.

The detective joined him in a glass.

"You see," said Williams, "under the suspicious circumstances, I naturally feel sort of backed up in the society of a man like you, Ensco."

"Thank you; but, as I said, I go no further than Nyack."

"And just there another old friend of mine will board the train, so that I shall have company as far as my destination."

"Good! but may you not be mistaken with regard to those four chaps?"

"Certainly; but can a man be over careful or over-suspicious in my place?"

"No; hardly."

Then the detective took a survey of his surroundings.

"Combination lock?" he asked, referring to the safe.

"Yes."

"Couldn't you get into it, yourself?"

"No; the combination is only known to the agent at the end of my route."

"What could robbers do, then, even with you at their mercy?"

"Tumble it out over the cliffs, and burst it open at their leisure."

"Ah! I understand. What may those kegs contain?"

"Silverspecie."

"And those little chests?"

"Gold coin."

"The deuce! but you are loaded this time."

"More than ever before in my experience."

"That was what made me nervous—before meeting you."

"You've been with the company a long time, Hank?"

"Eighteen years a messenger."

"Must have had some adventures with bad men?"

"A dozen or more."

"Did they ever get away with you?"

"Once only."

"Give us the yarn."

"It was in Missouri, on the Iron Mountain road. I was stunned, on my back, bound hand and foot, almost before I realized my danger."

"Did they get the swag?"

"Yes; but fortunately a light one. I was badly hurt, and the company paid hospital expenses."

"Was that your worst snap?"

"Not by a jugful! I fought off five masked men on the Union Pacific for more than an hour, and brought off my packages, too."

"Tell about that one."

The messenger complied, and in this manner the time slipped unconsciously along.

The last station before Nyack had been called, and the messenger was deep in a fresh story of adventure.

Suddenly the small door flew open, as if neither locked or latched, and three ruffians, armed to the teeth, bounded silently into the compartment.

Ensco and Williams were on their feet in an instant, but before they could draw a weapon the scoundrels had closed with them in a desperate hand-to-hand grapple.

To add to the disparity, a fourth ruffian swung in by the side door, from the roof of the car, and at once participated in the attack.

It was soon over.

Ensco reeled back early in the struggle, almost prostrated from a blow with a pistol-butt.

When he recovered two of the men had him tightly pinioned, while the two others were leaning over the messenger, who was bound hand and foot, bringing him around from a faint by dashing cold water on his forehead.

Williams gnashed his teeth when he realized the situation.

"But you've had your trouble for nothing," he growled, defiantly. "The chests and kegs are too heavy for you to carry off, and I couldn't show you the combination of the safe if I wished. I am as ignorant of it as yourselves."

The men, who were identical with those suspected by the detective at the outset, were villainous-looking scoundrels of somewhat foreign aspect.

The one who seemed to be their leader took it upon himself to answer the messenger's defiance, and in a most unlooked-for fashion.

"You're somewhat out!" said he, with a slight foreign accent. "We don't want your treasure."

The messenger was astounded.

"Not robbers?" he gasped; "not after the treasure in my charge?"

"No."

"Then what do you want?"

The leader pointed, with a sinister smile, to Ensco.

"That man's life!" he replied.

The detective understood in a flash. His first impression as to the man's object had been correct.

Scarcely had the leader spoke before the two men having Ensco in their grasp made a movement to hurl him out of the side-door.

The train was going at express speed; outside was the sheer wall of the precipitous river-bank.

The detective suddenly broke from his cap-

tors, with an involuntary exclamation of horror.

"Fight to the last, Rowlock!" yelled the messenger. "Would to God I could lend you a hand!"

But, all four ruffians assisting, Ensco was once more overpowered.

"Be ready now!" said the leader, and, grasping their victim securely, they imparted a swinging, seesaw motion to his body. "That's it. One—two—three!"

And the unfortunate detective was hurled into space.

But even in this terrible crisis Rowlock retained something of his presence of mind.

Down, down, down!

This was his first sensation, as he expected to be dashed to death every instant.

Then he struck upon something elastic and springy.

After that he seemed to bound up and off, like an india-rubber ball, and the next instant was floundering in deep water.

CHAPTER XXVII.

DEEP COVE.

COMING quickly to the surface, the astonished detective succeeded in reaching the shore.

It was a bright night, with a new moon.

The causes contributing to his extraordinary escape from death explained themselves.

A hundred feet overhead, cutting into the face of the sloping precipice, ran the line of the railroad.

There was a narrow field between the foot of the precipice and the water, and on this narrow field a small barn, with a huge, half-overturned haystack beside it.

The haystack had saved him.

He had doubtless alighted on its summit in a sitting position, bounded thence off into the river; and, moreover, he was certain that he had not sustained any injury whatever.

Congratulating himself, the detective was proceeding along a faintly-defined road under the cliff when he came to a narrow inlet, and at the mouth of the inlet there was a small cottage.

Meeting a boy, he inquired as to his whereabouts.

The lad was frightened, and replied in a sort of gibberish that could not be understood.

But just then a woman appeared at the door of the cottage, and with her the detective was more successful, for she answered him in tolerable English.

"We don't often see strangers along shore here, sir," she explained, in response to his first advances. "The boy is from back in the settlement, where they seldom speak English, among themselves at least."

"What do they speak, pray?"

"Low Dutch."

"Oh! and what may be the name of this place, ma'am?"

"Deep Cove."

Ensco repressed an exclamation.

Here he was at the very threshold of his destination, at the narrow mouth of Deep Cove itself, and through the very mishap that was intended for his destruction.

"You are dripping wet, sir," said the woman, peering out at him. "Have you met with an accident?"

"Ye-es; a sort of one."

"Ah, I see; you have perhaps been fishing, and fallen overboard. That sometimes happens hereabouts. Will you come in and dry yourself? My husband will be home presently."

Rowlock gratefully accepted the invitation, and, while following her into the cottage, managed to slip on his false beard, being satisfied that she had not as yet observed his face closely.

This proved to be the case.

The woman's husband made his appearance while the detective was drying himself at the kitchen fire, and he proved as hospitable as she.

They seemed to be a simple, hard-working couple, also of Dutch descent but with something more of worldly knowledge than their Deep Cove neighbors, with whose family affairs they seemed quite familiar.

Ensco permitted them to retain the impression that he had fallen overboard from a fishing-boat, and was soon sharing their frugal supper with them, and feeling himself generally at home.

"You have a quiet, secluded spot here," said he. "I wouldn't mind being better acquainted with it. Is there good fishing in the cove?"

"Only in spots," replied the man, "and the villagers are careful to keep them secret. We are very stupid and old fashioned," he continued, smiling, "and strangers are not always welcome among us."

"You seem to be an exception to the rule, then."

"We once passed a whole winter in Tarrytown," interposed the woman, with some conscious pride. "We're a little more civilized than others around here."

"And I worked a whole year over in the new aqueduct," supplemented her husband. "If my health hadn't broken down in the tunnels, I wouldn't be back here growing potatoes among these people."

"Ah, indeed! Nothing like travel and wide intercourse to enlarge one's ideas. Now I'm rather fond of solitude and the picturesque."

"I ain't!" said the cottager, decidedly.

"Nor me nuther!" echoed his better-half.

"Still," added the detective, deprecatingly, "you allow for a difference of tastes?"

"Oh, of course!" from both.

"Now, I've taken a notion for a moonlight trip back yonder in your cove. Anything worth seeing up there?"

The couple exchanged glances.

"You'd better not try it—at least, not by night," advised the man.

"No, indeed!" added the woman.

"Why? Haven't you a boat to spare—for pay, of course?"

"Oh, yes; we've a boat you'd be welcome to."

And the man uneasily crossed his legs afresh.

"Then what's your objection to my going?"

"There ain't no objection, only—"

"Only what?"

"Everything ain't just right back in the cove, sir," said the man, huskily, while his wife drew closer to the fire.

"Not right? Oh, never mind the Dutchmen's want of hospitality! I sha'n't trouble them."

"It ain't the Dutchmen, sir," interposed the good-wife, solemnly. "They're harmless enough, and they can be kind, too, for that matter."

"What is to be feared, then?"

"The Ghost!" the man took it on himself to reply.

The detective dissembled his increased interest, which was sufficiently vivid.

"A ghost?" he cried, laughing. "Come, now, I have a sort of fancy for ghosts. What sort of one is it that haunts Deep Cove—male or female."

"Neither, sir. It's a ship, or rather a sort of witch's steamboat, and that's her name—the Ghost."

"Oh, is that all? only her name?"

"But that ain't all, sir! She's a ghost by natur', no less than by name—or the devil himself, for that matter—and the devil's witch commands and lives in her."

"Dear me! but, my good friends, you only increase my curiosity. Give me some particulars of this strange craft, which I really must investigate by moonlight."

"Don't do it, sir!" they exclaimed in the one breath.

"Well, satisfy my curiosity anyway. When did the Ghost arrive in the cove?"

"Soon after daybreak, four days ago," said the cottager. "She's all dead black; she slips through the water like an arrow, but without a ripple; there ain't a sign of captain, crew or engineer; only the devil's white witch that runs her, and a poor, purty little gal what may be her slave, fastened down to her side by some heinous spell."

The wife at this juncture shuddered, and threw her apron over her face and head.

"Now this is interesting!" And the detective rubbed his hands.

"I call it horrible!" said the man.

"Never mind, tell me more. You saw the witch-woman, then?"

"We all saw her, that is, on the first day, when she even went into the village to buy some vegetables. Since then she's kept out of sight, though still on board."

"How do you know that?"

"By her voice—her occasional singin', which is as wild and beautiful as her face is frightful—so them say as heard it."

"Perhaps it was the captive, the young girl under the spell, they heard."

"No; the witch spoke to several when on shore. The singin' is hers; every one is agreed on that."

"Did the young girl go with her when she visited the shore?"

"No; she was only seen once, when on deck with the witch."

"What is the witch like?"

"Like a live corpse, only beautiful and—dreadful, with eyes in her head what would mesmerize a—ox!"

"Tell him about the snakes!" interposed the woman, with a sort of wail. "Don't furgit to tell about the snakes!"

"Oh!" and the cottager hurried himself to the front, so to speak; "I was nigh to furgettin' that. Yes; there's snakes!"

"Snakes?"

"Yes; sort of pets—yeller, blue, white an' speckled. Two young men who were fishing near the steamboat the first day, saw her with 'em. They crawled all over and around her. Luke Van Tassel, one of the young chaps, swore he saw her swaller one a yard long, an' then coax it back again out of her left ear with a stick of candy."

"Really? This is astonishing. Come, my friend, your boat, your boat! I sha'n't rest till I've had a look at this goblin craft."

The detective was now so thoroughly in earnest that they gave over the attempt to dissuade him.

Five minutes later, as Ensco stepped into the cottager's rickety skiff at the mouth of the cove, he dropped a coin into the man's palm.

"It's gold—a five-dollar piece!" exclaimed the man, staring at the coin in the moonlight.

"For your secrecy, no less than for your boat. Be faithful until my return, and you shall have as much more."

"Oh, Lord, sir! I'm your man."

"Wait; a yacht may draw in here by day-break, before my return. Her arrival is also to be kept secret."

"All right, sir; all right! God preserve you!"

The detective rowed off up through the dark neck of Deep Cove.

By less than half an hour's cautious pulling, he was in the deep shadow of an overhanging bank, directly under the Ghost's quarter.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE PHANTOM LAUNCH AGAIN.

ENSCO was satisfied in his own mind that he had approached thus near to the phantom yacht without attracting attention, even supposing a lookout to be on board, which did not seem likely.

In fact, the strange vessel had every appearance of being wholly deserted.

Presently, however, a low, sweet voice, in a wailing Spanish or Portuguese song, came floating from somewhere in the interior.

"Ah!" thought the detective, "the simple country folk were doubtless right. Though I can't remember to ever heard Zarapatta Martez lift her voice in song in the old wild days, I feel quite certain that the voice is hers."

He lay on his oars in the deep shadow of the bank for some moments, listening in silence.

The effect amid the profound solitude of the land-locked inlet was impressively weird and sad.

A few lights were still twinkling in the little hamlet on the hillside opposite, but that was all. On every other side the dark hills rose abruptly from the water's edge, the inlet being so completely and loftily folded in that even the moonlight only spangled and mottled it in small spaces.

Shaking off the spell of the music with an effort Ensco was about to risk a stealthy circuit of the vessel, in the hope of more satisfactory discoveries, when the soft, swishing splash of muffled oars reached his practiced ear.

He accordingly drew yet closer under the bank, and waited.

A moment later, the dark outline of a boat containing four occupants, slipped out from near where he lay on her way to the Ghost.

When a narrow strip of moonlight was crossed the detective's hands tightened on his oars, and his jaws came together with a soft but decisive snap.

He had recognized the occupants as the same ruffians who had so recently hurled him to his seeming doom out of the Express messenger's car.

The boat touched the steam yacht's side, and her inmates disappeared over the rail.

"So," thought the detective, "we shall make even a better haul than could have been anticipated when we cut out that accursed yacht. In addition to cutting the White Sibyl's claws and restoring Inez to liberty, we shall have a chance at those last would-be murderers of mine. Patience, my soul; patience and prudence!"

Nevertheless, his desire to make further investigations without delay—especially with regard to Nessie's continued presence on board—presently became overmastering.

He only waited long enough to improvise a muffling for his own oars, out of some rags and cord that he found in the skiff's locker, and then stealthily pulled out from the shadow of the bank.

By incessant caution, and an avoidance of every patch of moonlight when possible, he managed to make a complete circuit of the vessel without attracting attention from on board.

He finally came to a pause directly under the deep overhang of the stern.

Here he remained listening intently, for a faint light was now visible in the after ports, whose dead-lights were wide open, and he could just catch the murmur of voices within.

However, the words were not audible, or distinguishable, and his impatience increased.

A fresh risk might be destructive, but he resolved to take it.

Fortunately the moon was on the vessel's bow, which left the shadow of the stern overhang broad, dense and deep.

Making his skiff fast to the rudder, he succeeded in climbing in through a port-hole without making a sound.

He was in a small extreme-aft compartment, separated by a ground-glass door from the adjoining cabin, in which the light was shining, and whence the murmuring voices proceeded.

He could distinguish the words now, but only with the utmost straining of his sense of hearing.

There were two voices, of one of which he had no doubt, but of the other he was a little less certain.

The latter, very soft and musical, seemed to be the senora's.

The former, also low-pitched, but none the less masculine, he was sure belonged to the leader of the ruffianly group who had hurled him from the Express car.

"*Por Dios!*" murmured the womanish voice; "if you have killed the Harbor Detective, that is the main point—a glorious point."

"He can't have escaped!"

"But Rowlock is said to have more lives than a cat."

"If he had had a hundred, they would have been dashed out of him. You should have seen how we sent him flying!"

There was a low, musical laugh, with enough of the devil in it to be the White Sibyl's.

"Wouldn't I have liked to? It was a deep abyss, then?"

"Two hundred feet, if a yard, with rocks and the river below!"

"*Bueno!* You got off the train at Nyack, of course?"

"Yes; and then hurried back here."

"No talk there about our presence here, as yet?"

"Not a word."

"*Excelente!* We are still secure, then, and have only to keep up our mysterious movements and appearances to continue the awe-struck attitude of the simple yokels hereabouts."

"Any further orders?"

"No; that will do. Take your mates into the forecabin, and get something to eat. Jago is on deck, now?"

"Yes."

"*Buenas noches!*"

And then, as a door was heard to close, the musical voice took up its sweet, melancholy singing again, as an indication that its owner was once more alone.

Not the least allusion to Inez, so far!

Still not fully satisfied that the voice was the senorina's, and loth, in spite of the continued risk, to relinquish the hope of catching sight, if the merest glimpse of his dear betrothed, the detective was hesitating what next to do, when he suddenly had his first named doubts set to rest, and in a most unexpected manner:

A serpent—one of the yellow variety that the White Sibyl seemed most to affect in her extraordinary tastes—crept into view from amid the rich hangings of the compartment in which he crouched, and crossed the floor in a lazy, leisurely way before disappearance.

It might even have crept over and perhaps strung him while he had been listening so intently there.

In spite of his nerve, a cold perspiration suffused him.

"A doubting Thomas himself would be satisfied now," he thought.

The next instant he was half out of the window by which he had entered.

He was clinging with one hand, with his head just under the taffrail, when a stealthy step just behind it startled him.

He held his breath, peered up, and waited.

Then the bushy head and evil face of the man Jago were craned out over the rail.

The men's eyes met, but before Jago could start back or sound an alarm, his throat was in the detective's grip of steel.

It was a critical predicament for Rowlock, but his decision was taken in an instant.

His reserve force of muscular power was simply prodigious.

Notwithstanding the Spaniard being a burly, strong man, slowly and noiselessly in that tremendous one-handed grip was he drawn out over the stern, the detective in the mean time feeling his way down the stern-post with his feet and remaining hand.

Still, as the next best thing to his getting with his throttled prisoner into the skiff directly, which he found an impossibility, Ensco at last quietly dropped into the water with him.

Here, while holding on to the rudder, and using his teeth to haul on the skiff's line, a most unexpected interruption occurred.

There was a sudden swish of the rudder, a twirl of the propeller screw, and the Ghost began to forge swiftly a head.

Losing hold of the rudder, the detective had just time to seize the skiff's gunwale, while still hanging on to his captive, when he was drawn over on his back by the rapidity with which he was being dragged through the water.

Bettering his position by a great effort, he still retained his clutch of both skiff and man until the yacht had made a complete circuit of the land-locked space, and returned to her original anchorage, where she again became motionless.

All this was immensely, not to say uncomfortably, mysterious to our Harbor Detective.

How had the Ghost heaved anchor, got up steam and started her engine in such absolute silence? And what had been her object in making the brief and apparently useless circuit of the cove?

Relegating the first question to the general unaccountability of the Ghost's nautical character, Ensco answered the last by inferring that it was merely in keeping with the plan he had heard enunciated by the musical voice—i. e., to keep up a certain mystery of movements and appearances, for the benefit of the awe-struck yokels of the neighborhood.

While revolving these things in his mind, he had climbed into the skiff with his captive, cut the painter-line, and, by a careful sculling move-

ment of one oar, was slipping away into the shadows toward the narrowing neck of the cove.

When at last he released his iron grip upon the Spaniard's throat, there certainly seemed to have been no need of the clutch for some time back, so far as preventing an outcry was concerned.

The man fell over, limp and apparently lifeless, in the bottom of the skiff.

"No wonder!" thought the detective. "I should have thought of that before. Between the choking and the drowning the poor devil has undergone, it would be little less than miraculous if he were not done for completely."

However, after rowing as far back as midway into the neck of the cove, he set about trying to bring the fellow back to consciousness, and at last succeeded.

Jago opened his eyes, sat up, stared about him, and at last seemed to comprehend the situation.

"Here!" said the detective, tendering his brandy-flask. "Take another and a long pull at this. It may sort of brace you up."

Jago obeyed, and with such literalness that the flask was two-thirds drained when it was returned.

He then, however, though apparently fully restored, merely wiped his bearded lips with the back of his hand, and, with a low grunt, propped himself in the stern in stoical silence, though casting another longing look at the flask, as the detective returned it to his pocket.

"Now, my man," said the latter, "I want to have a little quiet talk with you."

"Me no talk," said the Spaniard, and he was about as good as his word.

The detective's most genial and persuasive efforts to extract some information with regard to the inmates of the Ghost, and especially as to Miss Delorme and the senorina, might as well have been exerted upon the air.

Jago sometimes grunted, and occasionally he smiled, but not an articulated syllable would he vouchsafe in response.

"This is growing a trifle monotonous," observed the detective, smiling.

He produced a special revolver of his, slowly denuded it of the rubber sheathing that had kept it dry from the river's drenching, and examined its chambers carefully.

Then he coolly cocked it, presented it point-blank to his prisoner's heart, while the smile on his lips took on a peculiarly deadly aspect.

"Now will you answer my questions?" he demanded, in Spanish.

CHAPTER XXIX.

SUSPENSEFUL MOMENTS.

BUT the Spaniard was true grit.

He had slightly started at the first blush of the leveled revolver, and he was not unfamiliar with the iron determination of the man that presented it to his heart, but that was all.

He merely yawned sleepily, threw back his head with a sense of weariness, and closed his eyes, as much as to say:

"Well, blaze away; but, for mercy's sake, don't talk me to death!"

Ensco's eyes glittered savagely.

"You know the penalty of your refusal?"

At last Jago did speak.

"Yes, senor, I do," he replied, with the utmost calmness, while slowly opening his eyes.

"It is death," said Rowlock, sternly.

"I know it, senor."

"And you still refuse to answer?"

"Certainly, senor. There is crime, even blood, on my hands, but treachery to a master or mistress—never!"

Rowlock uncocked and put up the weapon with a muttered oath.

"You're a brave man, whatever you may have been!" he said, sullenly.

The man inclined his head, and seemed relapsing into his stubborn silence.

The detective was not inclined to give up.

It seemed more important than it really was that his prisoner should be induced to unbosom himself.

Suddenly a fresh thought occurred to him.

He reproduced, not the revolver, but the brandy-flask.

"See, my man!" and he dangled it in the moon-rays so that the considerable quantity of spirits yet remaining sparkled very temptingly through the glass. "Would you like another nip?"

The temptation in that accursed form has overcome many and many a better and stronger nature than the poor, ignorant bravo's.

A new eagerness had sprung into Jago's dark eyes.

He stretched forth his hand, and there was a tremor in it.

"Yes, yes, senor!" he exclaimed, fawningly.

"More cognac—more, more!"

"Not so fast! Answer my questions first, then all that remains in the flask is yours."

"No, no, senor; the cognac first—the cognac first!"

Ensco reflected, and then resolved to take the chances.

"Promise to answer my questions truly, after you shall have drunk?"

"No, no; ah, señor! we cannot promise."

"Bueno, then! No promise, no brandy! That's the talk."

"Oh, but, señor, me very foolish, me very talky when me drunk!"

The detective handed over the flask.

When it had quitted the Spaniard's eager lips, not a drop remained.

Jago returned the flask with a polite smile, and cleared his throat with a sort of reluctant gusto, though it was a large pint that had gone down his red lane within a space of twenty minutes.

"Ah!" commented Rowlock, his good-humor already restored; "nothing like that devil's stuff to loosen a stubborn tongue—that is, in some folks. Eh, Jago?"

Jago smiled appreciatively.

"Now to business!" And, rubbing his hands, the detective began to go over his questions again.

Short-lived exultation!

The Spaniard was once more as dumb as an oyster.

It began to dawn slowly upon our professional friend that he might have been taken in.

"Curse you!" he cried; "you promised that the stuff would make you talk."

Jago smiled deprecatingly.

"When drunk, yes, señor," said he. "But many little flasks like that wouldn't make me drunk."

Ensco gritted his teeth, and tossed the flask away.

Then, more ashamed of himself than angry at the Spaniard, he forced the latter to take to the oars, and continued his course through the neck of the cove.

When near its mouth, the sound of other muffled oars than their own fell upon their ears.

"It's too early for the Seamew people to arrive yet," thought the detective. "What can this be?"

And he steered in under the high bank, enforced silence on the Spaniard's part at the point of the revolver, and waited.

A large yawl, with a number of rowers, keeping excellent precision with their long, powerful all but soundless strokes, came into view from the midmost waters of the lordly Hudson.

A near strip of moonlight was crossed, and Juan Martez, moodily contemplative, was visible at the stern.

The soft pure light flashed for an instant over his bended head, upon his burnished revolver and poniard-hilt, over the dark, swaying forms of his bearded followers, and then all had vanished up into the deep cove's narrow throat.

In a few minutes the yawl was out of sight and hearing.

"Good!" said the detective, unconsciously voicing his thought. "So many more to be scooped in when we cut out the steam-launch."

Jago gave a guttural exclamation, and he seemed about to speak.

But he did not, and the detective knew better than to renew the attempt upon the fellow's taciturnity.

An hour was yet wanting to daybreak when the cottager's little landing place was reached, and it would not do to re-enter the cottage, without certain explanations that might not be prudent.

So, having nothing better to pass the time with, the detective kept his prisoner leisurely at the oars a little offshore, and continued waiting.

It was wearisome enough, but soon after the first dawn-strokes began to appear in the East, the well-known yacht came in sight, tacking upstream in the teeth of a dry, gentle, northwest wind.

Ten minutes later Ensco was on board, with his prisoner in irons.

He consulted with Dago and Gaff, after recounting his experiences.

With the small number of men at command—only six in all, including Mingo, Jones and little Starlight—it was immensely risky to make the attack, even if a perfect surprise of the Ghost were effected.

But it was decided to make the attempt, as the opportunity might never again occur.

"With about four more good men, I should feel secure," said the detective. "Or even if Wright Vanderlynn might alone be with us once more."

"Wait," said John Dago. "As I told you, Mr. Ensco, I was born hereabouts, and am familiar with the neighborhood."

"What of that? The cove doesn't require any piloting, and is less than a mile in extent."

"I ought to be aware of that. But did you notice a large, dark old house, high up on a wooded hillside just at the first widening of the inner cove?"

"Yes."

"Four stalwart, dare-devil brothers, former schoolmates of mine, who would jump at the chance of sharing in our proposed adventure, ought to be still living there."

"What is their name?"

"Ten Eyck."

"Ah, Dutchmen, too?"

Mr. Dago smiled.

"Of that extraction, as am I, likewise," he

rejoined. "I think I could secretly bring them to join us, while the rest of you are towing in the Seamew. I suppose that will be safest, eh? to make the attack with the yacht herself?"

"By far the safer," assented Ensco, cordially grasping his hand. "You have taken the steel ram on our bow, of course."

"Yes; and with any sort of momentum, the Seamew would cut her way through a line-of-battle ship."

"Good! and may the wind necessarily be forthcoming on the inside, though I doubt it. All right, then; and I only hope you may find the stalwart brothers at home."

The Seamew had all this time been slowly entering the mouth of the cove, though the wind was now almost nil by reason of the inshore loftiness of the hills.

Accordingly, while Mr. Dago forthwith pulled away on his mission in the cottager's skiff, the rest of the force proceeded to tow in the yacht in her pinnace.

The moon had sunk behind the hills, and there was yet a good half-hour of the latter's deep shadowings to be looked for before the new dawn should have greatly increased its signal fires.

Moreover, they proceeded with muffled oars, and, as has been said, the inlet did not stretch very far into the land.

"This is prime," commented Starlight, who had wholly recovered his strength and vim, and was manfully doing his share of the work. "I feel romantic, I do."

Mingo gave his contemptuous grunt.

"What's yer gwine ter do, young feller?" he inquired. "An' what makes yer feel more-antic?"

"Oh, it's bully, Mingo. I feel like Bullrag, the Buccaneer, on his way to cut out Fire-Flipper, the Red-avenging Pirate of the Gulf. Didn't you ever read that book, old man?"

"I don't read no sich trash, nuffin' else," growled the sable giant, bending to his oar. "Go 'long wi' you, bantam cock."

Here silence was enjoined, and the slow work proceeded.

And it was slow work.

However, just at the inner winding of the neck there came a puff of wind, and the drooping sail of the dragged Seamew began to fill out.

"Splendid," ejaculated Tom Gaff, under his breath. "It's shifted fully two points east, and we're in luck."

Here Mingo dropped his oar and stared back at the yacht, every one else following the direction of his gaze.

A dark figure, moving with seeming difficulty, was trying to manipulate her rigging in some way.

"It's my prisoner, that infernal Spaniard!" exclaimed Rowlock. "Back water, and be lively! He's up to some mischief, I'll be sworn!"

Mingo did not wait for the comparatively slow action of the boat, but was overboard in an instant, swimming back to the yacht as only he could swim.

When the rest of the party got on board, three minutes later, the black had the Spaniard underneath him on deck, and the latter was undergoing a terrible strangling, which in another minute must have proved fatal.

"He was tryin' to cut the halyards," cried Mingo, as Ensco rushed upon him to interfere. "In anudder minute he'd hev hed de big sail down."

"No matter," and here the detective succeeded in rescuing the Spaniard, in the nick of time. "He's a brave man, Mingo, for all his deviltry, and if he meets death it shall be at the public executioner's hands."

Jago was secured afresh and taken below.

At this juncture the skiff was seen returning, and four men were in it besides Mr. Dago.

A few minutes later the four Ten Eyck brothers were introduced on board by their ancient schoolmate.

They were powerfully-built, fearless-looking countrymen, who, moreover, appeared to be eager for the fray.

"Welcome!" said the detective, taking them successively by the hand. "I doubted your willingness, my friends, when Dago acknowledged that you were Dutchmen, but I gladly ask pardon for my mistake."

"Dutch be hanged, sir!" cried Jake Ten Eyck, the elder of the stalwart brothers, his broad shoulders shaking with his good-humored laugh. "We're true American farmer men, by two hundred and fifty years descent, and there's not a man of us has ever backed out of a square, hard fight in an honest cause."

Everybody joined in cheering the Ten Eycks, though with more earnestness than vociferousness, and it was the general impression that the attacking force was now but little short of invincible.

"What luck! what glorious luck!" exclaimed Dago, who was at the wheel. "Just look at her fill out, Ensco!"

In fact, the wind, which had freshened not a little, was now fairly on the Seamew's quarter, and she was springing to her work as the steed that knows his rider.

Behind was the glowing redness of the increasing day; before stretched the widening cove, but even more deeply shadowed now than when only the moonlight touched its mirroring surface; beyond, faintly outlined against the deader background of the heavily-wooded shore, lay the steam-yacht, perfectly motionless upon the tideless cove.

"The Seamew's occupants waited in breathless suspense."

"Shall we cut right into her amidships?" queried Dago in a low voice.

The detective nodded.

On and on headed the white-winged yacht, her knife-like ram leveled straight at the sleeping enemies' waist!

CHAPTER XXX.

"WHEN GREEK MEETS GREEK."

It was a moment of intense and painful suspense.

The Ghost might have been a floating tomb, for all of life or movement that was visible aboard.

Black, graceful, silent, unconscious, she seemed no more than a nautical corpse, insensate and indifferent to her seemingly certain doom.

Suddenly a paralyzing thought flashed through the detective's brain.

Inez Delorme!

Might she not—indeed, was she not more than likely to—meet her death or agonizing injury in the shock that was now inevitable?

The thought turned him cold, but it was too late now.

The Seamew was silently pressing on, her knife-like steel ram cleaving the wave with the arrowy stealthiness of a black shark's razor-back fin.

Not a cable's length was now remaining between the ram and its destined prey.

Suddenly, however, and with the spectral unexpectedness of her character, the Ghost spun around, as if upon an unseen pivot, and her prow, instead of her broadside, was presented to the rushing blow.

Nor was this all.

Something was noted, entirely unexpected before.

Her prow was, likewise, provided with an added metal nose that answered as a ram.

However, the Seamew had the best of the collision, which occurred almost instantly.

Her blow was a powerful, though slanting one, and the Ghost shivered under it from stern to stern, while her above-water casing was ripped off like so much card-board for a length of a dozen feet.

But instantly her deck was black with men, she sheered off easily, while the Seamew was recoiling with her first shudder, and the ringing voices of both Juan and Vasco could be heard calling on their men to stand fast.

The next instant, however, the Seamew was grappled to her.

"Steady, there!" shouted the detective, in his cold, steely tones. "Now!"

And the ten men of the attacking party, with waving weapons, poured like a living, devastating torrent down over the steam-yacht's deck.

Little Starlight had not been so Quixotic or far out of the way in likening the situation to the days of piratical romance.

It was an old-fashioned sea-fight—a page out of the picturesque past—and right there in the bosom of New York State, in the year of 1887.

The day had broadened, so that everything was distinctly visible.

The Ghost men, though outnumbering the assailants two to one were at first swept into rout by the fury of the boarding party, notwithstanding the frantic bravery of the twin commanders.

But they made a stand aft, and then the fight was at its climax.

Revolvers cracked, knives flashed, bludgeons rose and fell, and there was a pandemonium of shouts, curses and yells.

But the four Ten Eycks, though armed solely with stout hickory staves, were like backwoods screamers from away back, Mingo was a whole team in himself, every one else in the attacking party seemed nerved to the performance of prodigies, and, moreover, organized discipline seemed to be in the ascendant on the part of the Seamew's people.

Several of the river-pirates had been laid out in the first rush, and now they were still getting the worst of the blows and peppering, though doggedly holding their ground at the head of the companionway.

A slight diversion was offered in their favor by Jago again bursting his bonds, and suddenly making his appearance from the Seamew, and frantically falling upon the assailants' flank with a flourished capstan bar.

"Bravo, muchache!" yelled Vasco. "You're my man, Jago! Keep it up! Down with the sleuth-hound spies!"

"He's my man now, and worthy of my bullet, too!" growled the detective, who had wheeled upon his heel in time. "Jago, you seem bound to have it."

His revolver spoke yet more emphatically than his tongue, and the Spaniard at the same

instant toppled overboard with the leaden missile in his heart.

Then, as Mingo, closely seconded by the Ten Eycks, suddenly freshened his assault, after snatching up an enormous crowbar, with which he sent down all before him, Ensco saw his longed-for opportunity.

Darting through the staggering ruffians like a bolt, he dodged a dig from Vasco's poniard, and the next instant had Juan Martez in his tremendous embrace.

"Murderer of Grant Marston! you are mine, mine at last!"

But Juan was like an electric eel even in that crushing grasp, his eyes glowing like coals, the birthmark arrow standing out in startling distinctness on his ghastly cheek.

"He laughs who wins!" he gasped, and one arm was again free with the dagger in its clutch. "Kill me, if it is Fate's will, but I will bite and sting unto the last!"

"Will you so? No; for the hangman, Juan, for the hangman alone is this dainty morsel of your life!"

Just then, however, Vasco once more rushed upon the detective with uplifted knife.

There was no help for it. The latter had to disengage one arm with which to hurl him back, and then Juan succeeded in tearing himself free.

The fight was almost at an end, with fully half the pirates prostrate, the rest in panic, and no serious casualties whatever as yet on the part of the boarding-party.

"All's lost!" cried Juan. "Follow me who can!"

With that he leaped overboard, closely followed by Vasco and such others as were equal to the attempt.

"After them!" shouted the detective; "let not one escape!"

And then, while the remaining victors were tumbling into the pinnace, to pursue the swimming fugitives, he dashed below.

The cabin, with its saloon and state-rooms, was empty.

He rushed through the place, calling loudly but vainly upon his beloved's name.

There was no answer but the echoes—not a trace of either of the senora or her captive.

Whose voice had he then heard singing, if not the senora's?

It occurred to him with crushing significance that Vasco's voice was wonderfully like hers, and he also remembered—alas! when too late—to have heard from Inez that the young man was an adept in sweet and melancholy music.

"Yes; the incident of the yellow snake's appearance was no longer confirmatory—it might have been accidentally left behind in the senora's hurried desertion of the Ghost, perhaps hours, perhaps days before.

Yes; he confronted the fact that he had been self-deceived.

He struck his forehead.

But at that instant his foot touched a piece of paper, which rustled beneath its tread.

He snatched it up.

Yes; hope for a second time baffled, deception confirmed!

It was another message from Inez, the merest despairing line, but bearing a date that was two days old.

"Ensco:—She is taking me away once more—out of the steam-yacht that has been my temporary prison—out into the unknown—whither I know not!"

"INEZ."

This was in the saloon.

He reeled under the bitter disappointment, but staggered toward the companionway.

Another paper, crumpled and soiled, as if dropped by accident, and then inadvertently trampled under passing and repassing steps, attracted his dazed attention.

This he likewise took up and examined, though with flagging interest.

It seemed to be a pen-and-ink communication in Spanish.

He thrust it, together with Nessie's message, into his pocket, and staggered up the companionway.

His frantic search had not consumed three minutes, but it seemed to have lasted indefinitely.

The fresh upper air, however, restored him to himself.

The pinnace, crowded with men, was already in hot pursuit of the swimming fugitives, while Gaff and Starlight were just putting off in the cottager's skiff.

The detective fiercely hailed the latter.

Inez was still lost to him—the White Sibyl of Morona as yet beyond his vengeful grasp—but here was at least a next best satisfaction close at hand!

In another minute he was in the skiff, and it was hue and cry upon the miserable sinners, with a short shrift for the hindmost.

The pinnace had already overhauled and dragged two dripping wretches on board, and the skiff was close and eager behind, while an exclamation from Mr. Dago, who was looking back, diverted the purpose in hand.

"Great guns!" he cried, "look at that devil of a steam-launch!"

No need of a second bidding.

All eyes were at once fastened upon the extraordinary vessel indicated.

She had snapped or cut her anchor-line, spun around like a water-top, and, with her spectral ease and noiselessness, was heading out of the cove at her accustomed phenomenal speed.

"She is the devil, and no mistake!" gasped Dago. "You were below in her, sir?" and he turned to Ensco.

"Yes; and only to find her interior deserted," was the moody response. "However, I did not look in the engine-room."

Pursuit of the swimmers was about being resumed when another exclamation, this time from Tom Gaff, permanently interrupted the affair.

"Shiver my timbers!" he yelled, "look at the Seamew. She's sinking!"

It was true.

The gallant yacht's sail had been hastily brailed up at the time of the rush of her entire ship's company over upon the Ghost's deck, and now, the grapplings having been mysteriously cast off by the latter in her phantom-like retreat, the Seamew was unquestionably heeling over and fast settling down at the bows.

"Jago's work!" roared Ensco, at the same time ordering a recall from the pursuit. "The clever hound must have scuttled her before attacking us in the flank!"

So it proved, but fortunately the damage to the yacht was not irreparable.

The auger-hole in her bow was speedily plugged, and half an hour later the water was pumped out of her; though all agreed that she had had a close call, and that a brief delay in the discovery of her condition would have been fatal.

The two prisoners taken out of the water were unrecognized ruffians, both of whom died soon after being hoisted on deck by reason of injuries received in the initial fight; the remaining swimmers had made good their escape to the shore. With the exception of Jago's body, which was never found, the other sufferers of the fight, wounded or dead, had been carried away on the deck of the disappearing Ghost.

Such was the result.

Somewhat later, a joyous exclamation of the detective, called Mr. Dago into the Seamew's cabin, into which the former had stepped but a few moments before.

"What is it?" demanded Dago.

Ensco was waving the crumpled and stained letter in Spanish over his head.

"A clew! an unexpected clew!" he cried.

"To what—to Miss Delorme's whereabouts?"

"No; but the next best thing. A clew to the stolen jewel-chest!"

CHAPTER XXXI.

A SECRET DIVULGED.

THE detective quickly explained his possession of the letter, which he had just succeeded in translating.

"It is from Juan Martez to his mother, the senorina!" he exclaimed. "The date is on the day following the triple tragedy on this yacht!"

"How does it read?" inquired Mr. Dago.

"Listen. The letter is dated at Tompkinsville, Staten Island; I will translate its contents as well as I can to you."

And the detective accordingly did so to the following effect:

"MY WISE MOTHER:—

"I have carried out your profound plan to perfection. The troublesome old senor and two of his followers are in Paradise—or elsewhere. It was murderous work, but last night finished the job. Jewels intact. I have just returned from burying them at the extreme west end of Rockaway, in the spot you selected. The second of the outer reefs, cup-shaped, that are visible at low tide. We can carry them off with us in the Ghost when the excitement incident to the affair shall have blown over, together with our little Inez. Vasco did not intercept the accursed detective, who has reached the yacht to discover—defeat. Nevertheless, I should have scuttled the Seamew directly following the affair. Our river band continues faithful to the death. Will visit you in person to-morrow."

"JUAN."

Mr. Dago rubbed his hands.

"Nothing could be more opportune than this information," he exclaimed. "Don't you advise proceeding to Rockaway at once?"

"We must think it over. Are you familiar with the locality specified?"

"Fairly so. I have some information of those outlying reefs or ledges."

"And they are mostly under water?"

"Yes."

"A queer place to bury away a treasure!"

"A capital place, for all that. Why, that was where the mythical Captain Kidd treasure was first looked for years ago!"

"But what would prevent the recurring tides from washing even a heavy object, once buried there, out into deep water?"

"The cup-shaped character of the reefs, as alluded to in that letter."

"They are of rock then, and not sand-bars, like the adjoining island?"

"They are both."

"How is that?"

"The foundation of the reefs is rock, worn in

deep holes, or pockets. Into these the sand washes in and out from the neighboring beach with the ebb and flow of the tides, though they are mostly more or less filled up, which gives them the appearance of shifting bars, when visible at all."

"So!"

"Any heavy object, laid away down under the sandy covering into one of the deeper of those rocky pockets or cups, would be secure from the action of the sea for ages."

"As little time as possible should be lost in making an investigation there. Isn't that your opinion?"

"Of course," said Dago. "The senora may take a notion to transfer the treasure to the Ghost at any hour."

"Heavens! what if the launch should be already off on that errand?"

"Not very likely," said Dago, after reflecting. "In the first place, the senora is not now on board of her."

"No; that is a certainty. Beyond two or three men who must have remained secreted in her engine-room, from whence they could also work her steering apparatus, there could not have been a soul below decks during the fight. I explored everywhere else thoroughly."

"Well, her present flight cannot be to any great distance. That is settled. But the twins have escaped, and there is no telling how soon they may re-man her. Yes; there had best be the least possible delay in our seeking the jewel-chest's hiding-place at Rockaway Beach."

"Is the Ghost sufficiently large and staunch to make a sea voyage?"

"A short one, yes."

"As far as Truxillo, Honduras?"

"At this season, undoubtedly. It would be a pleasure voyage over summer seas."

"We shall then but pause long enough to dry-dock the Seamew, and after that start for the Rockaway reefs."

"That will answer; for the Ghost must need repairs far more than we. Our ram tore up her side badly."

"And in the interim, fresh word may be obtained of Inez. My possession of this letter must not be known beyond ourselves."

"Of course not."

While this conference had been going on the Seamew had been making the best of her way out through the neck of the inlet.

At its mouth the Ten Eyck brothers were put ashore, after being cordially thanked for their services, and the cottager's skiff was at the same time returned to him, on which occasion the detective did not forget the additional compensation that had been promised.

The Seamew finally was just bidding farewell to the thenceforth memorable waters of Deep Cove when she ran upon a cleverly planted torpedo, in the middle of the narrow channel.

There was a tremendous explosion, and the yacht lost her steel ram attachment, which was broken short off of its fastenings, but beyond that sustained no serious damage.

There was no doubt whatever that the torpedo had been placed in the channel by the desperadoes remaining on the Ghost.

After that, the Seamew reached the dock-yard usually devoted to her repairs, at the foot of an East-side New York street, without further interruption.

It was by this time past noon, and all the battle-worn ship's company of the gallant yacht were glad enough to seek the rest and repose of which they were in such great need.

For this purpose, Ensco repaired to the Marston residence, where he knew that Mrs. Twiggs would be glad enough to furnish him with accommodations, and which he had not visited for several days.

John, the old coachman, sorrowfully touched his hat to him as he was passing through the grounds.

There was no longer the old-time patrol duty kept up there, since neither of the precious Marston treasures—neither the jewel-chest nor the beautiful young mistress herself—was any longer there to be defended, but John continued to carry his heavy stick, perhaps more from habit than anything else.

"Any news, sir?" he asked.

The detective sadly shook his head, and vouchsafed a brief account of the recent exciting happenings.

"How is Mrs. Twiggs?" the detective then inquired.

The old servitor—he had been in the Marston employ long before Inez was born—sorrowfully shook his head in his turn.

"Fairly, sir, fairly enough in body; but in heart—in mind!"

A hopeless gesture completed the old man's sentence.

"Poor woman! that is only to be expected," said Ensco. "I shall do what I can to console her, though it can't be much, and I am almost heart-broken myself, besides being worn out."

"Ah, sir; these be hard times!" murmured John, "and I almost fear that we'll look long for better."

He was moving away with tears in his eyes, when the detective detained him.

"A moment more, John," said the latter.

"The patrol is no longer continued, I suppose?"

"Ah, no, Mr. Ensco! Where would be the use, sir?"

"True; but I wish that it might be renewed for to-night."

"What! you still have hope, then?"

"I never lose that, my man. You will attend to the matter? And Gilbert is still able and willing to share your watch?"

"That he is, your Honor! Trust me for the rest. I suppose it's yourself that will think of resting within?"

"That is just it. There is no telling, you know, whether I may not already have been tracked hither."

"True for you, sir. Any further orders, sir?"

"Yes. If Mingo and little Starlight shall have been sufficiently rested, they will be at the boat-landing for me at midnight."

"An' in that case your Honor would wish to be stirring."

"Yes."

"I'll see that you're awakened, sir. Trust it all to me."

After spending an hour or two in trying to console Mrs. Twiggs, who was little less than inconsolable, the detective at last sought his much needed rest, it being then about sunset.

Ensco had been given a pleasant room on the second floor, overlooking the front piazza.

He chanced to aken toward midnight, when several remarkable incidents occurred.

The moonlight was brightly flooding his apartment.

Presently something, apparently a pebble, flew through the open window, and dropped upon the floor.

Then there was a queer little cry in a woman's voice, followed by a half-smothered oath, from somewhere outside.

The detective sat in bed, and listened with his soul in his ears.

CHAPTER XXXII.

STRANGE HAPPENINGS.

THE sounds were repeated, followed by a rustling noise, as of some one pursuing another through the shrubbery.

After that, silence.

Ensco slipped out of bed, and stole to the window.

Nothing was visible on the grounds.

Then he sought and picked up the object that had dropped on the floor.

It was a scrap of paper weighted by a pebble.

"Try the hulk-palace again."

Such were the written words on the scrap of paper.

Scarcely had Ensco mastered them before there was a slight movement outside, as of some one trying to scale the piazza.

Obeing a sudden instinct, instead of again advancing to the window, he stole back to bed.

The bed was somewhat back in shadow, the rest of the room being brightly bathed in the moonlight.

He had just ensconced himself therein afresh, revolver in readiness, when the window was darkened by a stealthy human form.

Its slender gracefulness caused the detective's heart to leap.

Then when the figure's face was turned to the light, he could have cried out for joy.

It was the face of Juan Martez, murder in the eyes, a poniard in the clinched teeth.

The haggard face of a worn-out, desperate, but still murderously resolved, man.

The figure remained framed in the window for an instant, looking in as though to take its bearings thoroughly before entering.

The detective's right hand crept from under the sheet, secure in the shadow, and his revolver covered the midnight intruder's heart.

Should he shoot?

It was a hard struggle with his natural inclination, but he silently put aside the pistol out of his hand.

No; alive and for the hangman!

Such had been his iron determination, such it should remain.

But scarcely had the intruder's feet touched the floor than the detective was upon him with a tiger spring.

There was just time for the dagger to flash once uselessly aloft in the weird light when its owner was in that terrible, that adamant clutch.

A sort of muffled roar burst from Juan's lips, he gnashed his teeth, writhing his sinewy body like a serpent.

But in vain.

The detective gave a low, terrible laugh.

"At last and forever!" he muttered. "My murderous little Juan, I could love thee at this moment, thou art so close, so dear to me! It is thy doom."

But still there had been some struggling resistance, and it had brought Ensco back to the window.

Now there was a click, a muffled report, and a bullet grazed his ear.

To wheel, still clutching his prey, was but an instant's time for the detective.

Vasco was at the window, his revolver cocked for a second shot.

Ensco made an involuntary movement to one side as the second bullet sped.

That saved his life, but caused his victim's cheek—the left cheek—to be redly furrowed by the speeding shot, as a companion scar to the arrow birth-mark on the other cheek.

But yet again was Vasco's ready revolver on the cock, a fit accompaniment to the murderous laughter in its wielder's eyes.

The detective was compelled to reach out and grasp the weapon.

This enabled Juan to writhe out of his grasp by a renewed effort, suddenly exerted.

Then the detective was sent reeling backward by a flush blow full in the throat.

When he recovered, brief as had been the respite afforded, the twins had vanished.

Ensco threw on his clothes with a baffled, savage disappointment at heart, such as he had never felt before.

As he finished dressing, John's voice was heard calling him from below.

"Is there anything wrong, sir?" the coachman called up as the detective again appeared at the window.

"I should say so!" was the answer.

"Mingo and the lad are at the landing, sir."

"All right, John! Where are you last from?"

"The landing, sir."

"Directly before that, I mean."

"Talking to a wild woman, sir."

"What?"

"Yes, sir; but she's gone, now. That's what I wanted to ask you about when they signaled me at the landing."

"Oh!"

"Shall you come down by the side-door, sir?"

"No; this will answer."

And the detective was out over the piazza roof and down at the patrol's side in short order.

"Why did you first ask me if anything was wrong?" he demanded.

"I was hurrying up from the landing, sir, when I thought I heard a couple of smothered-like reports."

"Ah! then you saw no one?"

"No, sir; only the woman. Bless me, sir! was there anything else? Have you seen any one?"

"It is no matter. Now about this woman, tell me of her." And the detective led the way a little further from the house.

"Ah, sir, such a woman! She came upon me all breathless, saying some one was chasing her, but I could see no one."

"What more did she say?"

"That she was a friend of yours, and had thrown a piece of paper containing important intelligence into your window."

"Oho!"

"She wasn't certain that she had chucked it through the right window. That was why she accosted me, apart from being scared by the fancied pursuit."

"Fancied?"

"I thought so, sir; though she was willing to swear that a man with a knife had made for her the instant after she had thrown the paper."

"Ah!"

"But she was awfully glad when I told her that she had chanced on the right window—your room-window, sir."

"What became of the woman?"

"She was so earnest and wild-like, and begged so hard, that I let her go without any more questioning. Directly after that Mingo's signal took me down to the landing."

"But what was the woman like? Describe her."

John did so, after his fashion.

Nevertheless, the detective, much to his mystification, recognized by the description—Mrs. Emroled.

"That will do, John. I shall not return to my room, so you may consider your patrol duty at an end."

Then the detective hurried down to the landing, where Mingo and Starlight were awaiting him in a hired boat.

"To Hunt's Point, direct!" was his order as he got on board.

But no sooner had they shoved off than a woman was seen beckoning to them from under some trees at the opposite side of the grounds.

It proved to be Mrs. Emroled, who was taken on board at her earnest solicitation.

"I want you to land me at Bowery Bay, sir" said she. "The ferry that brought me to this side is no longer running, it is so late."

The detective nodded, and gave the necessary order.

She had settled down at his side in the stern, on his making room for her.

"I see you must have got my missive, sir."

"I did, Mrs. Emroled, thank you!"

"Oh, if it may only lead to something!"

"How did you obtain the information that inspired the line you sent me, madam?"

"From my husband."

"And he?"

"Is now lying at the point of death, I fear."

"You exaggerate."

"No, no; I only wish I did."

"How could you leave him, then?"

"It was only at his express injunction—in order to convey the message to you."

"Where did he obtain his information?"

"He wouldn't tell me. But I suspect it was from a strange ruffian whom he killed in a desperate struggle last evening in the wood back of our cabin."

"H! the fellow had attacked him?"

"Yes, sir. My husband, before mastering him, received the injuries that I fear must cost him his life."

"And the ruffian?"

"I think he must have become conscience-stricken just before his own death, and then imparted to George the information he insisted on my conveying to you."

"This is all very extraordinary."

"Oh, yes, sir! but do make them row fast. I fear my husband may die before my return."

"The man and boy are doing their best, ma'am. If there were more oars, I would take a pair myself. Is your husband alone in the cabin?"

"The physician may be with him by this time. He was to have come at midnight."

"Try to compose yourself, ma'am."

"I am trying, but it is so hard."

"How did Emroled know that I would be found at the Marston residence?"

"He did not know; we took the chance of finding you there."

"A fortunate chance. Did he not also send a verbal message?"

"Only to beg that you would bring Inez to us the first thing, should you succeed in effecting her rescue. Oh, you will do so, you will, sir, will you not?"

She clasped her hands in an agony of entreaty.

"Do compose yourself, Mrs. Emroled," said the detective, after a pause. "That shall be done."

"Oh, thank you, sir, thank you!"

"Nonsense! Now satisfy my curiosity on a certain point."

"Oh, of course, sir."

"Directly after tossing the weighted message into my room window, were you really pursued, as you asserted to the coachman?"

"Oh, truly, sir!"

"By whom?"

"By a terrible-looking young man, with a knife in his hand, and a red mark on his cheek. He disappeared as I ran out of the shrubbery toward the coachman."

"Ah, that will do."

"Were you in danger, sir? Had I interrupted him in a contemplated crime?"

"It matters not now. All's well."

Nothing more was said until Bowery Beach was reached, in the vicinity of the Emroled cabin.

Ensco assisted Mrs. Emroled ashore with the respect that he might have shown to a dis-crowned and unfortunate queen.

"You won't forget, sir?" and she again clasped her hands. "You will bring her to us first?"

"My word is passed, madam. God speed you, and may your husband be found in better trim."

She darted away among the trees.

"For Hunt's Point!" repeated the detective on resuming his place in the boat.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

SUNSHINE AT LAST.

SOON after starting afresh, it occurred to Ensco to ask about the Seamew.

"She'll be all right to-morrow, boss," said Starlight, in answer to the inquiry. "Mr. Dago will have her at the Astoria anchorage by noon."

"That is well."

"I say, boss," continued the boy, after a long silence, only broken by the dip of the oars.

"Well, my lad?"

"What was the matter with Mammy Emroled, that she wouldn't hardly notice me to-night?"

"She was too much occupied."

"I should say so—gaddin' round the river-fronts at this time of night! Of course, I ain't nothin' to her, an' never was. Oh, no."

"Your 'mammy' is in great trouble," said the detective, gravely.

"What about, sir?"

"She fears her husband is dying."

Starlight dropped his oars to burst into tears. The Emroleds had reared him from infancy.

Greatly touched by the lad's exhibition of feeling, Ensco did his best to comfort him, and with some success.

A new day was affording its hints as the boat rounded the northern end of Ward's Island, and thence headed in a straight line for Hunt's Point.

As the hulk drew in sight, the detective fastened his eyes upon it hungrily, fiercely.

Success was not to be snatched from him this time, he was certain of it.

The shrewdness of the senora in returning with her captive to the hulk, directly after it should be found apparently deserted by her for

good, struck him as something little short of sublime.

That is, on the supposition that he would find such to have been the case, of which he now felt there could no longer be any doubt.

Yes; her astuteness in such a move was to be admired.

None other could have so much insured her security, or have been so apt to disarm suspicion as to her whereabouts.

As they drew nearer the hulk, it appeared, externally, more battered, deserted and forlorn-looking than ever before.

But the detective was not again to be deceived by appearances.

With torpedo-remembrances still vivid in his mind, he cautioned his oarsmen to the utmost prudence, and softly guided the way into the narrow water-space between the hulk and the shore.

Here his first movement was to noiselessly unship the gang-plank, and set it floating.

He had scarcely done this, and was moving stealthily along, when movements and voices were distinguished as coming from within the hulk.

The early morning light was as yet but semi-darkness.

He held up his hand, his followers sat in the boat like statues.

The sounds increased, but were still vague and meaningless.

The trio in the boat were in the shadow of the hulk's prow, and between it and the shore.

At this juncture Mingo silently drew out the boat, so that a better view of the river was commanded, and then slowly pointed with his hand.

Something was looming up over the water, a vague bulk in the thickness of the gloaming.

What was it?

Then the Ghost made her presence evident.

She was approaching the hulk, but more laboriously, and with less of the gliding, mysterious ease, than had heretofore distinguished her.

"Aha!" thought the detective; "your ghost-ship still aches from that dig of the Seamew's in your black ribs, and you are also short-manned. So much the better!"

As the steam-launch, nevertheless, drew up to the outer side of the hulk, the noises in the latter interior resolved themselves into hurrying steps on the companionway.

Ensco made a sign, by which Starlight remained in the skiff, while Mingo followed his own example in peeping over the hulk's deck.

The next instant the senora, followed by Inez, made her appearance at the top of the companionway.

The detective recognized them both, notwithstanding that their figures were much enveloped in wrappings.

The senora made an impatient sign to the one man that was visible at the Ghost's gangway.

"Nearer!" she called out in Spanish. "*Car-amba!* how can we jump that chasm?"

"I'll throw out a plank," replied the man, in the same tongue. "Our side is badly ripped, and we dare not come nearer."

"How many of you?" she demanded, while he was stooping over the plank.

"Only the engineer and steward, besides myself."

At this instant the detective and Mingo bounded on the deck.

The senora uttered a snarl, Inez a scream of delight.

Then Ensco had seized the latter, pressed his lips to her forehead, and passed her over to Mingo, while he himself made a spring for the White Sibyl.

But the latter was not so seizable as her whilom captive, by reason of her bosom companions, the snakes, having taken the alarm.

In fact, a dozen or more hideous flat heads were already darting out from amid the folds of her garments, she seemed sheathed in an atmosphere of angry hissings, and moreover her long, gleam-lit dagger glistened in her desperate hand.

"Quick, Jim—Farrish!" she screamed. "To the rescue, or we are lost!"

The man at the plank—the desperado launch-captain—was at her side in an instant, revolver in hand.

But the detective dashed him aside, evaded the lunge of the senora's poniard, and, in another instant, had got her in his steel-like clutch, despite her serpent guardians.

"Hag! foul witch!" he growled; "your time is come. The woman-serpent is at last helpless in the athlete's clutch!"

She was a powerful woman, and was still struggling demoniacally.

"Never!" she gasped through her gnashing teeth. "Still, as of old, are you subject to my power!"

He felt a dozen stinging sensations on his face and hands, and knew that he was as repeatedly bitten by the reptiles, but it only nerved his enormous strength afresh.

The next moment he hurled her through the air.

Then, merely perceiving that she fell in a heap on the deck of the Ghost, which was

now sheering off yet further from the hulk in a crippled, uncertain manner, he wheeled to confront the anticipated onset of Farrish.

But that ruffian was already writhing in the mighty grip of the negro Colossus, who had thrust Inez behind him to meet the former's rush.

Jim Farrish was a trained desperado, of immense physique and bulldog courage; but he was no more than a wooden effigy in Mingo's tremendous grasp.

"Give me a show, can't you?" snarled out the ruffian, with an oath.

"Dat's what I se gwine ter do, boss," was the panted reply. "Hyar yer go!"

With that the launch-captain was whirled aloft and out over the intervening water-space, as if shot out of a catapult.

He struck the side of the launch with a force that must have broken half the bones in his body, and then fell into the water, a motionless, mutilated mass.

A man had appeared upon the Ghost's deck and helped the senora to her feet.

Now the vessel quickly rounded out, and steamed away.

Inez was ere this sobbing and moaning in her lover's arms.

Ensco gave orders to his followers to remain on the lookout, and then drew her with him down the companionway.

"Are we alone here?" he asked, after striking a light, and looking around him in the saloon they had entered.

"Yes, yes; there was no one else here, and she will not return. She was on the point of abandoning this place forever. My love, my darling! But how strangely you look!"

"Oh, Inez! I fear we meet but to separate forever."

"Heavens! what mean you?"

"Look at my hands, my face! I am hopelessly stung by her accursed serpents."

Inez gave a cry, but it was one of relief.

"Their bites are painful, but harmless. Wait!" She ran to a drawer, and returned with a little cup full of a greenish-colored paste. "Here, let me apply this ointment. There; is it not a relief?"

"Wonderful! The pain is gone already. She had had the poison-fangs of the creatures extracted, then?"

"Yes; or she would never have handled them so recklessly. They would bite her at times, though, and then she used this paste as a relief. You are sure the pain is all gone?"

"Yes."

"Then it will not return."

She put the cup away, and once more melted in her lover's embrace, but without the accompanying sobs and tears.

Joy, pure rapture and thanksgiving, were now in the ascendant.

"Did the senora treat you cruelly?" asked Ensco, when these transports were somewhat subsided.

"No; beyond depriving me of my liberty and never letting me out of her sight, she was not unkind."

"You must tell me the details of your captivity at once."

"Now and here?"

"Yes. After that there is much for you to do in my company—that is, if you are equal to it."

"I am equal to anything now! What is in store for me?"

"A visit."

"A visit?"

"Yes; and a revelation."

"Come now; whither must I then go with you? Direct to dear Auntie Twigg's? Is she fallen sick, then?"

"No; full of suspense and anxiety on your account, but no worse. After you shall have told me your story, which will doubtless quiet your excitement, you must first accompany me to the cabin of the Emroleds."

"That strange couple?"

"It is solely to their information that you owe your rescue. Besides, I have promised, and Mr. Emroled is probably on his death-bed."

"Let us start at once, then. I can tell you my story on the way."

"That is far the best," said the detective.

"To tell the truth, I am not comfortable in this uncanny place."

When seated together in the stern of the open boat, with Mingo and Starlight once more at the oars, Inez told the story of her adventures.

After being so unceremoniously gagged and dragged into the thicket, during the attack upon the boat house, she discovered her captor to be the launch captain, who had shortly before her rescue met his death at Mingo's hands.

By this man she had been hurried into a small boat, in waiting not far away, and thence taken on board the Ghost.

There the senora had received her, and without further ado she had been carried away to the hulk at Hunt's Point.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

INEZ TELLS HER STORY.

"How did the senora receive you?" asked the detective.

"With ceremonial sternness at first," replied Inez. "She said that she was my natural guardian. If obedient to her wishes, I would find her indulgent, kind and amiable; if untractable, I would find her just the reverse, and she would make me very unhappy."

"Did you temporize with her?"

"Not at first. I was far too incensed and indignant. I not only defied her, but boldly taxed her with being privy to my grandfather's murder and the robbery of the jewels."

"Ah! and then?"

"She flew in a dreadful rage at first, and I really feared she would kill me in her fury. She controlled herself, however, after a time, and affected to treat my charges with contempt. 'You are a headstrong, foolish girl,' said she. 'By and by, you will see that it is to your interest to conciliate me and be subservient to the future I have in store for you.'

"I asked her what that might be. She said that, after she had arranged a certain business in this vicinity, she would carry me with her to her mountain hacienda in Honduras, where I should marry Vasco—who had fallen deeply in love with me—and be very, very happy for the remainder of my days."

"Indeed! and did she vouchsafe to explain this pressing business that delayed such a joyful consummation?"

"Partly, in answer to my sarcastic inquiry."

"What was the business?"

"To first assure herself of her sons' safety from pursuit, by accomplishing *your* destruction."

"Ah! my death was indispensable to that end, eh?"

"Yes; she frankly acknowledged that so long as you lived she and her sons could not count upon a moment of security."

"Well, anything more?"

"Yes; that blissful object accomplished, she would only have to take on board the Ghost a certain buried treasure, after which it would be 'Ho; for Honduras!' with never a care or uneasiness but might be left behind."

The detective knitted his brows.

"God willing, we'll forestall her in that business too!" he muttered.

"Was it the stolen jewel-chest she referred to, think you?"

"Undoubtedly."

"But you cannot know where it is secreted."

"That I do, my darling! And our first business, after this visit to the Emroled cottage, shall be to go in quest of it."

Inez clasped her hands.

"The jewel-treasure—our treasure!" she exclaimed. "Can it be possible?"

"It is true." And he related the manner of his obtaining the information.

"That letter of Juan's!" she cried. "It is strange that the senora should have been so careless as to lose it. She was exceedingly jealous of her correspondence."

"Now let me hear you continue your story, Inez."

"Well, after our arrival at the hulk, the senora introduced me to her serpent-pets, and in other ways so terrified and humbled me, that I gave up my defiant attitude. After that, she was much kinder to me. I soon found that her object was to elude pursuit by not remaining with me long in one place. Our departure from the hulk was as hurried and unexpected as our arrival there. I was barely given time to secretly scrawl that first note of mine to you, which I see you must have received."

Ensco nodded, and she proceeded:

"Again on board the Ghost, we went to a secluded inlet somewhere up the Hudson. Juan and Vasco were then with the steam-yacht, together with a large crew of desperate men. But they were very careful about not showing themselves, and to an outsider the Ghost must have seemed as unaccountably deserted yet alert as it had to me on that first occasion when her first appearance so terrified us all. During this time I also got an idea of the stringent regulations by which this air of mystery and ghostliness was so thoroughly maintained."

"I can imagine all that," said the detective.

"Tell me if you were annoyed by either Vasco or Juan during your last sojourn on the Ghost."

"Not to any great extent, though Vasco persisted in singing for his mother and me a good deal. I am compelled to say that he has a most exquisite melancholy voice, which, strangely enough, likewise bears a strong resemblance to his mother's."

"I discovered that, to my cost," interposed the detective, a little bitterly. "But go on, my darling!"

"Besides," continued Inez, "we were not long enough in the Ghost for even Vasco to make many advances toward me. At dusk of the evening following our arrival in the secluded inlet I have alluded to, the senorina gave me a glass of wine, saying: 'My child, I want you to drink this. It will support you over a rough journey that I find we must set out upon without another hour's delay.'

"Much as I feared the senora, I was quite certain that she did not desire my death, and so drank the proffered wine without demur."

"Instead of supporting me, the draught al-

most instantly threw me into a sort of speechless trance.

"In this condition I was dimly conscious of being taken to the shore, of getting with the senora into a coach, of reaching some town, of crossing a great river—doubtless the Hudson—of a brief railroad journey; and when I recovered my normal senses at last I was once more in the hulk."

"Ah! she had drugged you to speechlessness, to prevent your appealing to outsiders for protection against her *en route*."

"Yes; so I thought afterward. But before the wine had quite accomplished its deadening effect, I had found time to scribble another line for you and drop it in the Ghost's cabin."

"I found it, at the same time that the letter in Spanish so opportunely came to light," said Ensco.

"Well, but little more is to be said. After that the senora and I were altogether alone in her hulk-palace. But I had even less chance for escape than before."

"She watched me as a cat would a mouse. She was jealous of my slightest movement. And I am sure that she must have secretly given me a sleeping potion regularly before resting, to make sure that I would not make an attempt to escape during her own slumber."

"I had almost given up all hope of being rescued by you, and grew very despondent. But last night at midnight the senora awoke me. She bid me to make myself ready, as the Ghost might call for us at any hour, and we would never come back to the hulk again."

"The senora seemed restless and anxious—what I had never remarked in her before. She even shed tears at the thought of leaving so much fine furniture and other property behind as were in the hulk."

"I asked her why she could not take her property with her on the Ghost. She said there would not be time. Her manner became more and more anxious and depressed as the time wore away without the launch putting in an appearance."

"Ha! she must have got secret news of our battle in Deep Cove. She felt that she was getting at the end of her rope, and the sensation was doubtless unpleasant!"

"A battle?"

"Yes; I shall tell you of that presently. Did she also seem to be anxious about her sons?"

"Yes; terribly so. But at last she seemed to be aware of the Ghost's approach. And she hurried me up the companionway. You know the rest."

The detective now had his story to tell in his turn.

When it was concluded the boat had reached its destination.

"I say, Miss Delorme," said little Starlight, as Inez stepped ashore. "Ain't you goin' to do anything more than jest nod and say Howdy to a feller what once was your guide and perceptor?"

The young girl laughed, for her old buoyancy of spirits was almost restored to her by this time.

"I don't know about that, Starlight," she replied, stopping to pat the boy's brown little face.

"What more should I do?"

"Nothing now, miss!" and, rubbing the spot she had patted, he kissed his palm. "No feller could ask for any more sweetness than that."

She laughed again, nodded brightly to Mingo, and accompanied Ensco in the path leading up to the cabin.

"Under what other strange circumstances was I in this neighborhood once before?" she exclaimed. "I do hope that we shall find Mr. Emroled in better case than you said."

Then she noticed how grave her lover had grown, for it saddened him to think of how soon her sunniness of feeling might be overshadowed.

"What is the matter, Douglass?" she asked.

"Yes; I am going to address you only by your true name hereafter—Douglass, Douglass, tender and true! Why are you so shockingly sober? Ah, I remember—I am to be treated to a revelation, you said."

They were now near the cabin.

He merely drew her hand through his arm, saying, "May you be able to support it!" and then they entered the door side by side.

Emroled lay on the couch, apparently near his end, his wife kneeling at his side.

But at the sight of the beautiful young girl the flush of life seemed to return to the dying man's face, and his eyes to brighten with a wild new hope.

Mrs. Emroled had sprung to her feet, her face the index of conflicting emotions, her breast in tumult.

"My child!" she cried, seizing the girl's hands. "Come, be quick! He is dying—he would have you kiss him before he passes away!"

Emroled was also stretching out his arms to her with an imploring gesture.

Inez was drawing back, bewildered, frightened, but mostly indignant.

Kiss him—a perfect stranger, or little more than a stranger to her—kiss him, even when dying!

Was the woman mad, were they both mad? What could it mean?"

She turned inquiringly, half-resentfully, to the detective.

The latter was very pale.

"Go to them, Inez," he faltered. "It is meet, it is just that you should. They are your parents, child!"

Her parents!

It was too much.

She reeled and fell.

CHAPTER XXXV.

A REVELATION.

BUT it was in her own mother's arms that Inez fell when overcome by that unexpected shock.

It was her own mother's pained, long-suffering eyes that first met hers when she again opened them, with a dim realization of the astounding revelation that had been made.

"Speak to me, my darling, my daughter!" cried the woman wildly. "Tell me that you did not faint with shame, with mortification, that you had found your parents in us!"

For a first answer, Inez impulsively threw her arms about the withered neck, drew the poor lips down, and kissed them tenderly, thankfully.

It was more than had been hoped for. The woman wept such tears of joy as she had never known before, and there was also a sound of weeping from the couch.

"Shame! mortification!" repeated the girl, rising. "Wherefore anything but joy and ecstasy for me. I cannot understand—it all seems strange and dream-like. But he"—indicating her lover with a grateful gesture—"has said it. Hence it must be true; and it needs but that to be everything that is holy and sweet!"

Then she hastened to throw herself beside the couch, her lips were pressed to the marbling brow of its occupant, and the mother hovered over both while the trembling hands of the dying man wandered over the lovely bended head.

"Ensco, quick, come here!" cried Delorme at last. "Justify me in her sight—tell her my story so that I too can hear you before I am gone!"

The detective had come to the foot of the bed.

"Listen to the story of your father's wrongs, Inez," said he. "Your mother's father—your grandfather, Captain Marston—was at first satisfied that she should marry your father, George Delorme. But the latter had been loved previously by a woman who swore to wreck the happiness of the young couple. That woman was she whom you have known as the Senorina Zarapatta Martez."

"Though herself married to a worthy gentleman, and already the mother of the twins, Juan and Vasco, she had wedded for money and position, and the thought of her secret first choice becoming the husband of another turned that former love to undying hate, and she succeeded but too well in keeping her infernal oath of vengeance."

"As Captain Marston's niece, she readily became a guest in his house."

"Your father and mother were also living with the captain, and you were then but a few months old."

"In a few weeks after the young senora's arrival there was a tremendous forgery perpetrated upon the Gotham Bank, in which Captain Marston was heavily interested, besides being one of the directors."

"Funds deposited therein to the amount of nearly a million, belonging to the first Honduran Revolutionary Party, of which General Martez was the chief, were paid out on a series of checks or drafts that subsequently proved to be clever forgeries."

"The bank was already in difficulties, and the making good of the amount paid out on the forgeries completed its misfortunes."

"It failed, with great financial loss to its directors and stockholders. Your grandfather, especially, Inez, was for the time being ruined. Beggary stared him in the face, and he was furious."

"It was at this critical time that participation in the forgeries was seemingly brought home to your father, George Delorme."

"The evidence against him, though subsequently proved to have been manufactured, was sufficient to satisfy a jury of his guilt."

He was convicted, and sentenced to a severe term of imprisonment. The old captain was cold and deadly in his animosity to his son-in-law.

"The young wife was forbidden to ever mention her husband's name, on pain of being driven forth upon the world; and the Senora Martez returned to her tropical home, secretly rejoicing in the success of her plot; for it was solely owing to perjured testimony, secretly secured by her wealth, that the unfortunate Delorme had been consigned to a felon's cell."

"Your scarcely less unfortunate mother lived, suffered and hoped."

"At last a gleam of relief was hers."

"When you were little more than three years old, your father, George Delorme, effected his

escape from Sing Sing, and successfully eluded all efforts to recapture him."

"Your mother, however, was in communication with him, and lost no time in announcing to her father that she was determined to resume relations with her husband—which, by the way, she had never considered more than temporarily interrupted."

"The captain swore that in such case he would disown her, and she should never more be child of his; but that he would, nevertheless, treat her child as his joy and heir, on condition that both parents would abandon every claim, and consider the child as dead to them."

"Your mother knew that her father would keep his word, and she made her choice."

"She sacrificed her affection for her child, and joined her husband."

"From that day to this have the faithful, sorrowing couple buried themselves in this rude cabin, secure in their toilsome obscurity and in their assumed name of Emroled, which is nothing more than a reversed spelling of Delorme."

The detective came to a pause, but the dying man raised his hand supplicatingly.

"Don't forget the vindication!" he gasped, with pitiful eagerness. "Don't forget that for her, Ensco."

"I would not have forgotten it, old friend," said the detective, gently; and he then went on: "Within a few years of your father's escape from prison, Inez, and while you were yet very young, it all came out that your father had suffered a cruel and irreparable injustice."

"One of the false-witnesses, who had been suborned by the young senora's money, through a Spanish agent of hers, made a dying confession to that effect, which was published."

"The confession was speedily confirmed by various circumstances."

"The newspapers took up the subject. George Delorme's innocence was made apparent. Had he remained in prison, he would have been speedily restored to liberty by legal methods, probably with some sort of reparation."

"But injustice had made a bitter misanthrope of the man."

"He had, moreover, found a species of balm in his poverty and retreat, and resolved to remain dead to the world. His wife cleaved to him."

"They were confirmed in this resolve, notwithstanding that it separated them irrevocably from their child, by the attitude of Captain Marston himself."

"Just and generous in other things, he refused to believe in his son-in-law's innocence, and remained implacably prejudiced to the last."

"In fact, this was a warp, and a most unpleasant one, in the old pilot's character that I have never been able to understand."

"I have sometimes thought that he was hardened to this continued injustice through his doting love for you, who had become the apple of his eye; and that he dreaded a resumption of decent relations with your parents lest it might separate you from him."

"At all events, he remained deaf to the appeals of justice and of nature. Your parents accepted the continued hardship, though it was breaking their hearts, day by day and inch by inch, and the stern, unnatural old man remained, on this point, relentless and immovable to the end of his tragic death."

"Since then your parents, acting upon my advice, have still kept silent, intending to remain so, even to the further violence to their instincts and their longings, until your grandfather's murder should have been avenged, and you yourself relieved of the suspense and unhappiness attendant upon the uncertainty and mystery of the affair."

"Fate has willed it that the revelation should be hastened."

"I should have mentioned that even General Martez, who was an honorable but over-adventurous man, became greatly alienated from his wife through the detestable part he believed her to have been guilty of."

"Indeed and finally, I know of my own knowledge, that this mainly prompted him to commit to your grandfather's charge the jewel-treasure whose possession has proven so fatal and so tragic."

"True, its transfer was intrusted to the senorina herself, but under safeguards that she could not violate; and it was only after the general's death that she was enabled to bestir herself toward the commission of the terrible crimes that followed."

"Inez, the story is finished. Child and parents are reunited at last, inseparably reunited, let us hope."

"Yes, inseparably!" gasped Delorme. "I feel it, I know! Death steps in, but his separating touch is only apparent, not real. Marguerita, my wife! Inez, my child!"

"Ah, he is dying!" sobbed the girl, wildly. "My father! my father!"

But even as she implored the world-worn and suffering spirit passed from its earthly tenement.

After the first transports of grief had in a measure subsided, Inez insisted that she should remain in the cabin until such time as her mother could leave it with her.

But Mrs. Delorme would not permit this; neighbors were sent for who consented to share her watch over the dead; and the detective at last succeeded in leading the weeping girl away.

It was but natural that Inez should feel her father's loss less deeply than had it occurred after she had more fully realized the restored paternal relationship.

She turned to Ensco, with brimming yet still curious eyes, when they were once more in the open air.

"And what must be *your* strange history, my beloved," she murmured, "when you seem to have mixed so mysteriously and intimately in that of me and mine?"

"Though brief as strange, my darling," he gravely replied, "it must yet for a short time remain untold."

He might have said more, but just then there was a warning whistle, and little Starlight appeared in the path they were pursuing.

"Hist, boss!" he ejaculated, in a hoarse whisper. "The game's on foot again!"

"What is it?" demanded the detective.

"The Ghost is a-cruisin' near. Mingo thinks she may be lookin' for the twin devils to take 'em aboard."

"Ha! Where is Mingo and the boat?"

"Down in hidin' near the boat-house what was gutted and burned. It's in among them willows. I'll show you."

"No," said the detective, after a slight pause.

"I know the spot. Starlight, run into the cabin. Afterward you can find means to rejoin us."

"What's up, boss?"

"Poor Mr. De—Emroled is dead."

A lump rose in the boy's throat.

"He was a father to me, boss," he half-sobbed.

"Thank you, boss!" And he hurried away.

"I shall go with you," said Inez.

Ensco hesitated.

"There may be fresh danger."

"No matter; if I cannot remain with my mother, my place is at your side."

When they reached the spot where Mingo had concealed the boat, the negro was found covertly studying the movements of the Ghost, which had come to a pause just off the point.

"See!" said he. "Dere's her small-boat, Marse Rowlock, loafin' up an' down, back an' forth, jest before de ole boat-house. Oh, I knows it, Marse Rowlock, I feels it in de bones!"

"What is it you feel and know?"

"Dat some of dem debbils is a-hidin' somewhere hyarabouts, boss, an' the ole she-debbil am gwineer pick 'em up, if possible. Dere! what did I done tell yer, boss?"

A man was here seen to wade out to the small boat, and climb into her.

"Ha! You are right," exclaimed the detective. "Come with me, Mingo!"

CHAPTER XXXVI.

A CAPTURE.

INEZ also accompanied them, and they crept around the curve of the bay, under cover of the trees and undergrowth, to a point close under the ruins of the boat-house, whence the Ghost's small boat was visible close at hand, the steam-launch herself lying a short distance further out.

The senora's solitary figure was the only thing of life visible on the yacht's deck.

But her eyes seemed to be fastened anxiously on the shore-line and the hesitating movements of the boat.

The latter contained but one oarsman and the man who had waded out to her, both foreign-looking men whom Ensco and his companions failed to recognize.

"Hold on, Marse Rowlock!" whispered Mingo.

"Dere's more to come yet—I feel it in de bones. Gorry! off it might be dem twin-debbils, an' we could get our hooks on 'em at dis last minute!"

"Too good to hope for, I am afraid," said the detective. "But I can understand how some of the fugitives from the Deep Cove affair might have made their way back here as affording them a temporary security. Still, that Juan and Vasco should have done so is more than I can believe."

Hardly had he spoken before the first-named twin, Juan, broke cover from close at hand, and was the next instant running out through the shallow water like a hunted deer.

Without waiting for permission, Mingo was after him in an instant, with a whoop and a yell.

Ensco was about to follow when Inez laid a touch upon his arm.

"Look!"

She was pointing through the underwood to Vasco, who, seeing that his brother was being pursued, had come to a startled pause at the water's edge, just under the shadow of the same thicket from which Juan had just emerged.

Both young men wore a desperate and hunted air.

While still hesitating at the water's edge, Vasco suddenly drew his revolver and leveled it at his brother's gigantic pursuer.

But before it could be discharged the Harbor Detective was upon him with a panther bound.

There was a desperate struggle, the young

Honduran seeming gifted with a desperate strength that was little short of superhuman; while Mingo had almost overtaken Juan, who seemed to be partly dazed, about midway to the yawl.

The senora saw it all.

Inez could plainly mark her excited movements up and down the yacht's deck, and could guess the agony of maternal suspense that inspired them.

It was like a tigress witnessing a murderous attack upon her beloved cubs, and she wounded, or helpless in the meshes of the hunter's snare.

The detective had finally succeeded in overmastering his prisoner, and snapping a pair of handcuffs on his wrists.

But at that instant there was a shot from the yawl, and Mingo was seen to come to a staggering pause.

A moment later, Juan, after hesitating whether to return to his brother's aid or continue his flight alone, was seen to clamber wearily into the boat.

The latter then pulled back to the Ghost without delay, notwithstanding that the senora was frenziedly shrieking her protest against the abandonment of Vasco to his fate.

Shortly after this, the Ghost steamed out of sight, Juan and the two other men being last observed on her deck, apparently doing their utmost to subdue the transports of the enraged senora.

In the mean time, as Inez came hurrying to his side, Ensco had completed Vasco's subjection, and Mingo was slowly staggering back through the shallows toward the group.

The latter, however, suddenly came to a pause, and, dropping to his knees, plunged his woolly head repeatedly in the water.

After this, much to the astonishment of his friends, he came trotting to the shore, with his vigor apparently altogether restored.

"Gorry, Marse Rowlock!" he exclaimed, with his champion grin; "I done t'ought I war done gone in, shuah. But look!" he exhibited his ear, which was slightly bleeding. "It war de wind ob de bullet, an' dat am de fact!"

"You are extremely fortunate, Mingo," said Ensco, heartily, while Inez also congratulated him on his escape. "See; we have one prisoner, at all events."

Mingo looked down upon the helpless Vasco, who had, however, by this time put on a reckless and indifferent air, and then shook his head.

"Ah, but dat udder one, he war de king-pin ob de pair, Marse Rowlock," he murmured. "I'd hev got him, shuah, but fur dat bullet! Oh, gorry, gorry! to t'ink dat Mingo war knocked out by jess a breaf ob air—by de wind ob a bullet! I'se 'shamed ob yer, Mingo! I'se 'shamed ob you from dis time fort', I is!"

Nevertheless, he cheerfully carried the prisoner to the boat, all the party got on board, including Starlight, who had returned from the cabin, his eyes red with weeping, and the prow was next headed for the Marston grounds at the foot of Eighty-sixth street.

"Thank Heaven! it is broad, sunny daylight, with plenty of river-craft in sight," said Ensco to Inez. "It is not likely that any accident or interception can rob us of such prey as we have succeeded in securing."

Low as he spoke, Vasco, who was lying bound not far away, had overheard the words.

"That is true, Ensco!" he cried out gayly; "and I suppose you are in sympathy with the old saying, 'Better half a loaf than no bread.' Inez, my dear cousin! do you remember the last pretty song I sung for you? *Carajo!* I am still in tune, if you say the word."

No attention was vouchsafed him, but he, nevertheless, did begin to sing; and when handed over to the police, was as blithe and jocular with them as they were carrying him off to the prison confinement which he might not permanently quit, save to meet a felon's death.

Having dispatched Mingo and Starlight to carry word to Mr. Dago, Ensco lost no time in hurrying into the mansion, where the lost one found was already being overwhelmed by the congratulations of the household.

Mrs. Twiggs was in an ecstasy of tears, while the joy of the young girls' Cockney maid-in-waiting was especially demonstrative.

A little later, when Ensco and Inez were alone, the former signified his willingness to tell her his history.

"Though I may appear much younger," he began, "I was born in New York thirty-nine years ago. So, I am nearly, if not quite, double your age, my darling." And he looked at her with a slight shade of anxiety in his inquiring gaze. "Does not that make me seem very ancient to you?"

Her soft hand stole into his.

"I would, assuredly, not have you a day younger, Douglass," she replied with much simplicity.

"But why?"

"Because, I would not."

"That is no answer."

"Because I love you as you are, then."

"But I cannot forget that youth attracts youth by natural law—that most young girls are best pleased with young men as lovers."

Her arm was about his neck, her lips at his

ear, though the deepening blush on her perfect face was not wholly hidden away.

"You darling! you brave, you dauntless darling!" she murmured. "I love you, not for your youth nor for your years, but for yourself alone!"

"Truly?"

"Ah, but you do not you can never doubt it! Would I have you unseared by a single experience or adventure that may have written over the dark pages of your varied life? No, not for the world! My heart could never have been given save to a man, and as such, have I found you, my hero, my ideal!"

"Still, if I were just a little younger?"

"Then you would not be yourself—my 'Douglass, Douglass, tender and true.'"

"Still—"

But the perfect lips were now kissing away his words, and more in that vein she would not hear.

"Your story!" she murmured, presently.

"Let me have the story of your life."

"Well, there is yet more against me than my hoary antiquity."

"Is it possible?"

"My parents were poor and obscure persons, of Scotch extraction, and are long since dead."

"I have always admired Scotland. The Highlanders are a noble race, barring the bagpipe, the horrid kilts and bare knees; while I just dote on Bobby Burns and Walter Scott."

"I never had either brother or sister."

"Nor I; which makes us even."

"But I hardly ever even went to school; am almost wholly self-educated."

"Self-made men are my admiration, when not too worshipful of their maker, as I am sure you are not."

"Thank you. But, hang it all, my love, I'm not self-made. After my long battle with the world, I am poor to-day as a church mouse."

"Poor in filthy lucre, you mean."

"By Jove, Inez! you won't permit me to make out my own photograph."

"Self-depreciation is not good. Will you go on with your story, sir?"

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE DETECTIVE'S HISTORY.

"I EARLY went to sea," went on the detective, "and thereafter the water was chiefly my home."

"At the age of eighteen, I found myself, after years of restless adventure, a member of General Martez's revolutionary force in Honduras."

"The general had not long been married, and I became a favorite with both his young wife and himself."

"The Senora Zarapatta was at that time a singularly beautiful and attractive woman, with little if any manifestation of the evil inherent in her nature. The twins were beautiful children of five or six years."

"I was a sort of privileged retainer in the family, then second to none in Central America in wealth, influence and social standing, though constantly in more or less hot water through the general's turbulent revolutionary tendencies."

"These also occasioned home differences. The general was a Liberal of the Liberals in politics and religion—a Democrat and born leader in one; his wife sympathized with the most bigoted of Conservatives, who were mostly in power in Church and State—an *aristo* of the old Inquisitorial stock."

"However, she had been poor and ambitious, and he had brought her wealth and reflected honors. For appearances' sake, they were seemingly one in everything, though there were many secret bickerings, and her violent, cruel and heartless temper, as it developed itself, was a source of much suffering to his honorable and generous spirit."

"Though nearly a man grown, I was at that time of very boyish appearance, fair-skinned, fair-haired, ruddy-cheeked, bright-eyed, just the sort of a *Colorado* to hit the fancy of the senoritas of that summer clime, who are mostly of a dark beauty and languishing manners, which latter, however, are so often the mask of volcanic passions, that may be dangerous when thwarted or roused."

"I thus allude to my personal appearance as the only possible explanation of the favoritism in which the Senorina Martez held me—at first. It was not love, but a mere caprice, on her part. I was her *protege*. She called me her *Americano Colorado*, and made much of me. For my own part, I early penetrated the beautiful creature's fierce, false and treacherous disposition, and came to hold her in secret distrust and dread."

"Moreover, she had even that early in life come to like such pets as snakes, jaguar cubs, and similar unpleasant companions, which were no less her husband's abhorrence than my own."

"I was brave and adventurous in the intestine military and political troubles, of which Honduras was more or less constantly the theater, and soon became a favored member of General Martez's staff."

"The revolution of which I spoke was by no means the first or only one in which I was engaged."

"The second, which occurred a year later, placed Martez in power. But the differences between him and his wife had increased, and he was the more inclined to favor a proposed visit to her New York relative at that time. He even made her a sort of Government financial-agent, and, when she took her departure, it was in company with a couple of native merchants, trusted and experienced men, supplied with large sums of money, for the furtherance of political recognition and commercial alliances.

"The senora, on the occasion of that visit, left her twins at home. That was also the occasion of her accomplishing the ruin of your poor father, George Delorme, which, as you already know, was indeed the private object of the voyage.

"Don't look so distressed, for I shall hardly be forced to allude to this melancholy subject again.

"The senora's visit did not last a twelve-month, but what a long period is that for a country, the chronic prey to political earthquakes!

"She left us in full feather, at the apex of the governmental fabric; when she returned, we were hunted fugitives in the mountains, our army a ragged remnant, our *comisariato* the wild game of the primeval woods, the remaining bulwarks of defense our shivered bayonets and broken swords. We had been up and soaring; we were down again with a vengeance—the rocket-and-stick business over again.

"Then did the treacherous, ingrate nature of the Senora Martez declare itself at last. Her mask of hypocrisy was flung aside. She denounced her husband and his cause, openly espoused the Conservative Church party, then again in power, and even donated a large sum of money to its success in hunting down the unfortunate Martez and his followers.

"By strange coincidence, the sum of money thus infamously contributed was identical with that obtained from the Bank of Gotham on forged acceptances, and for alleged participation in which George Delorme had been sent to State Prison—ah! I have brought it up again, though it was hardly to be helped!"

Inez interrupted him with a passionate gesture.

"God of justice!" she exclaimed, inconceivably shocked, "had the vile woman actually instigated the forgeries herself?"

The narrator shook his head dubiously.

"That is not known, probably never will be known to a certainty. But the fact is as I have stated. There was no other source from which the senorina could have obtained such a great sum, though she pretended there had been, and hinted of secret operations in the New York gold market, which had been unexpectedly successful.

"But her own husband at that time believed her capable of such baseness. There were others—men not in political affiliation with him either—who secretly coincided with his opinion. Moreover, of the two merchant agents who had accompanied her mission, one had mysteriously disappeared, and the other, a Colonel Blanco, returned in such suspicious familiarity with the fair traitress that his name was coupled by rumor with hers in a manner by no means complimentary to the morals of either. But of all this there was no proof; it was rumor and suspicion—nothing more."

Inez threw up her hands with a hopeless, despairing air.

"My father, my poor father!" she half-sobbed, "what chance had he—what chance might any honorable, unsuspecting man have had—when environed by such toils? Oh, it is too, too horrible!"

The detective hastened to continue his narrative:

"Our cause—that is, General Martez's cause—was almost at its last gasp, but such of us as were left alive continued to stick together. But the armed search for us was incessant and severe.

"A year after the beginning of our misfortunes, I was taken prisoner in one of our flying skirmishes in the heart of the Cordilleras, about sixty miles south of Comayagua, on the Nicaraguan frontier.

"The Senora Zarapatta had in the mean time risen greatly in the estimation of the governing power, and had established herself in a wild, mountain-girt and fortified hacienda, one of her husband's confiscated estates, which had been presented to her as a reward of her treachery.

"Its deep, hot valleys comprised indigo and coffee plantations, that were immensely lucrative, and there she held a sort of isolated and barbaric court, surrounded by her peons and retainers, among whom, by reason of her friendliness with serpents, no less than by numerous other eccentricities, she was already known and held in mysterious awe as the White Sibyl of Morona—this last being the ancient name of the hacienda, or miniature principality, over which she held absolute sway.

"It was by one of the licensed predatory bands attached to her estate that I chanced to be captured, and I was brought before her for judgment.

"Two years had passed since we had last met,

and no sooner was I in her presence than I understood one of the qualifications of her new appellation.

"Her complexion, which had formerly been of pure and transparent though healthful pallor, had already assumed that dead, bloodless and absolute whiteness which has ever since remained one of her characteristics. And added to this, her eyes and general expression had somehow taken on that serpent suggestiveness which even now contributes so greatly to render her beauty so terrible—so magnetic and yet so repugnant."

Inez shuddered involuntarily at the recollection of her recent forced companionship with the senora.

"She smiled strangely when I was brought, a captive, into her presence, and by a gesture dismissed the guerrillas guarding me.

"I was then alone before her. She was magnificently throned amid gorgeous trappings and upholsterings on a sort of dais of red velvet, fringed with golds, while the numerous pet serpents twining about her person seemed fitly emblematic of her untrammelled and evil power.

"She spoke me very sweetly at first, referring to her former liking for me, and her regret that we were no longer friends.

"I began to secretly congratulate myself on a prospect of getting out of her clutches easily; for former prisoners from our band had, almost without exception, been tauntingly dismissed from her presence to be shot on sight.

"But her next words dashed me from the pinnacle of hope to the depths of despair.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE DETECTIVE'S HISTORY, CONTINUED.

"SHE coolly proposed that I should betray the last fastness of my leader (her own husband—the father of her children) and his followers into her hands, that they might be extirpated forthwith.

"This was her infernal proposition. Compliance therewith was to be richly rewarded; the reward of its refusal was instant death.

"On my instant and contemptuous rejection of her proposition, she flew into a fury that positively appalled me.

"She loaded me with reproaches and the peculiarly diabolical epithets that are the special property of the Spanish tongue, swore that she had always secretly hated and despised me, and then called in her swarthy minions to lead me out to my death.

"Upon their appearance, however, she changed her mind.

"I should have mentioned that, in my passionate and unguarded rejection of her proposition, I had permitted myself to allude mockingly to the serpent-suggestiveness of her countenance.

"She remembered this now, and, controlling herself, said: 'Wait! *Americano Colorado*, I shall reserve you for another fate. You have alluded to the serpent-element of my beauty. I shall so brand you that you shall never lose the sense of my power, and after that you shall pine in perpetual imprisonment.'

"She then ordered that her twin boys should be brought in, and also engaged in consultation with one of her peons, an aged Maya Indian, who proved to be a professional embalmer and tattooer among his tribe.

"Then I was unopposed, thrown down, my arm bared, and there, in the presence of her twin-devils and herself, I was subjected to the operation that left me impressed with the emblematic device that you have seen.

"It was indescribably painful, even agonizing, and the more so that there was then and there performed swiftly and at once a tattooing elaboration that is seldom, if ever, effected in the course of many successive days.

"But I bore up, and not a complaint or protest escaped me during the torturing ordeal, notwithstanding the taunts of the senora, the aping amusement of her retainers and the mocking laughter of the juveniles, who seemed to deem my suppressed anguish the rarest of sports.

"When the design was fastened indelibly upon my arm, the senora surveyed it critically, but not with unmingled satisfaction.

"It is not altogether as I would have had it," she said. "There should more unmistakable signs of the athlete succumbing to the serpent in the contest, and the red arrow from the cloud—as symboling Heaven's assisting vengeance at my supplication, no less than duplicating the divine birthmark on my elder twin's fair cheek—might have been represented as already finding its rankling home in the wrestler's breast. However, it must answer. Away with him to the prison-cell that shall likewise be his tomb."

"For five days I nursed my painful arm and the hope of vengeance in the solitary prison-cave to which the senora's serpent-malice had consigned me.

"On the sixth day I effected my escape, and rejoined my fugitive brethren. But, alas! they were by this time reduced to a pitiful handful. Shortly after this we separately effected our escape over the San Salvadorean frontier.

"Years later my wandering and adventurous life again led me to Honduras.

"The indomitable Martez was once more at the top of the revolutionary caldron, or nearly so.

"He was heading a powerful liberal faction in an endeavor to get possession of the government, and, what was yet more strange, his wife, the senora, had temporarily thrown her conservative friends over, and was a partner of his enterprise.

"I could never quite understand how the general had consented to a reconciliation, but have a general idea that it was brought about solely for political motives. At all events, though they were living in the same palace, their establishments were otherwise distinct, and I soon found that their intercourse was confined solely to public occasions.

"I was once more persuaded to cast my errant fortunes with the revolutionists, and again became an officer on General Martez's staff.

"Three days later we were beaten in a decisive battle with the Government troops on a plain midway between Truxillo and Comayagua, and were once more fugitives and proscribed.

"However, a considerable force still remained to us, though our future looked dismal with difficulties daily thickening around us.

"It was at this time that General Martez decided to send away for safe-keeping the jewels that had been but recently contributed by numerous wealthy and influential Liberal families for the benefit of the cause, until such time as they might be converted into cash, or returned to their original owners according as the next turn in the tide of war might determine.

"He had become an intimate and appreciative friend of your grandfather, Captain Marston, during his exile, and pitched upon him as the custodian of the treasure. I think his selection of his wife as the treasure-bearer (under certain outside and accompanying supervision that was trustworthy) was determined upon, chiefly with the desire to secure her absence, together with that of her twins, from Honduras, for he had evidently never lost a fear of fresh treachery on her part, and the sons were so much under their mother's influence that he had hardly any more confidence in their professed good faith than in hers.

"So it was arranged. You know the rest, or most of it, Inez.

"The senora's vain attempt to obtain the jewels from your grandfather after they had been delivered into his custody; her return to Honduras, leaving the twins to become your household companions; her subsequent treachery, by which her unfortunate husband was, for a fixed price, betrayed into the hands of his executioners. These are facts already within your knowledge.

"There is not a great deal for me to add. Before the senora's return from her second mission we had been defeated in a second battle and hopelessly scattered. Soon after the gallant general's death I managed to escape from the country, never to return. The senora had retired with the proceeds of her treachery to Morona.

"There she continued to live in rather reduced splendor, apparently nursing the dream of sooner or later obtaining possession of the jewel treasure—whose value was doubtless exaggerated in her imagination—by fair means or foul. Her sons, upon their return to Honduras, were entered into the naval service there, in which I have learned they chiefly distinguished themselves by careers of lawlessness, insubordination and crime. But it's a mighty one-horse sort of a navy, for that matter.

"Their reappearance here of late, and the crimes that signalized their presence in New York are too fresh to be dwelt upon between us.

"Several years ago I entered the detective service here, and had already somewhat distinguished myself in my specialty when I made your grandfather's acquaintance. My former intimacy with General Martez was a further introduction into his good graces. He made me his friend and confidant. Then came the whirl of darkness and crime that made me your friend and counselor. Thank God, I am also your lover. I feel that our long and stormy quest is nearly at an end. Then you will be my bride, my wife, my eternal. My story is ended."

He opened wide his arms, and Inez showed her appreciation of the strange, eventful history by melting upon his breast.

"Tell me one other thing," she said, at last.

"What is it?"

"Should the senora succeed in carrying the treasure away?"

"But she shall not succeed! We shall be beforehand with White Witch, if there is justice in Providence and the old wind-charm in the Seamen's white wings?"

"I said if—"

"Ah, pardon me!"

"If she should succeed?"

"Well?"

"Would she be able to apply their money value to her own use?"

"With scarcely a doubt. The families that originally contributed the jeweled heirlooms are no longer in existence. I think that, with

scarcely an exception, they were literally exterminated, root and branch, by the bloody, relentless reprisals following upon that last crushing defeat of the liberal cause in Honduras."

"Then if we should obtain possession of the jewels?"

"Then they would be ours, or rather yours, as being a part of your grandfather's estate, subject solely to the proofs of other ownership, in total or in part, being non-existent, according as systematic and honorable inquiry might determine."

"That was what I wanted to know."

It was now late in the afternoon, and at this juncture it was announced that little Starlight had returned from the dockyard with a message for Ensco from Mr. Dago.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

PREPARING FOR A LAST EXPEDITION.

THE messenger was at once admitted, and his tidings proved to be of the utmost importance.

Mr. Dago was already on his way to the Astoria anchorage, with the Seamew in perfect trim.

Mr. Dago would also anxiously await fresh orders there, and the good northwest wind was freshening, with indications that it would hold.

Ensco at once arose with an eager look.

"Hooray!" cried Starlight, wholly unsubdued by the unusual splendor of his drawing-room surroundings. "It'll be up anchor and away again. Won't it, boss?"

The detective gravely nodded.

"What is your plan?" asked Inez.

"Undetermined as yet. Shall have to consult with Dago."

"Well, I shall get on my things in no time." And she started to quit the room.

"Hold on! Surely you are not going?"

"Am I not? Then I don't know myself."

"Run on down to the landing, Starlight." And then, after the boy had disappeared. "I really have not thought of you accompanying us, dearest."

"But I have meant it from the first."

"There'll be a heavy swell on, like enough, down the lower bay."

Worse than on the stormy night when I first began to—know you?"

He flushed with pleasure.

"That terrible, yet partly joyful, first night!" he muttered. "No, no; of course not. Still, down Rockaway Reef way, with this freshening wind?"

"An off-shore one, before which the Seamew will glance and skim in the moonlight, like one of her white-feathered namesakes in the wild wave's running wake!" And then her soft touch was on his arm. "Besides, when has lower bay ground-swell troubled a tried salt like me?"

He took her in his arms, gazing lovingly down into the sweet, brave face.

"You will have it so?"

"I shall not sever from you again—even adventure must not separate us more!"

"Fresh danger, perhaps; I doubt not that the Ghost may likewise choose to-night's low tide for a like attempt."

"Have I ever shrunk from danger when shared with you?"

"This is so soon upon the shocks you have sustained—the recent revelation—your new-found parents?"

"Ay; and my poor father dying on the threshold of it all! But that is why I must go with you." She dashed aside the springing tears. "I would not forget—no, no! but I must have change, excitement, and sympathy shared by you. Oh, Douglass! don't you understand?"

"Yes," and he kissed her brow. "Go and make yourself ready, in God's name!"

The boat, with Mingo and Starlight at the oars, was in readiness when they reached the little landing, and, better than that, the graceful Seamew could already be sighted at her Astoria offing.

Half an hour later Ensco, Inez, and Mr. Dago were consulting in the yacht's saloon.

"When is low-tide at the reef?" demanded the detective.

"An hour after midnight," replied the yacht captain.

"And the moon?"

"Then at its meridian."

"Had we not better start at once?"

"There is ample time, but we are already getting under way. In fact, there was no particular need of coming up here from the dry-dock, but I was anxious to see how the Seamew would work after her scraping and repairs."

"How does she work?"

"Beautifully—to a charm!"

"Has it occurred to you that one or two of us might prudently reconnoiter by running down to Rockaway Beach by rail?"

"Yes; but it won't be necessary. With this wind we'll make the reefs easily by midnight, with perhaps an hour to spare. Then the regular excursion business is not yet fully under way at the beach, and we'll be likely to have our treasure-seeking all to ourselves."

"Unless the Ghost should choose the next low tide for her opportunity, too."

Mr. Dago shifted his position a little uneasily at the table where they were sitting; only looking up to nod his acquiescence to Gaff, who at that moment looked in to announce that the yacht was under way.

"Of course, that has occurred to me," said he, after a pause. "But I've thought it all over, and we would have the advantage of that infernal steam-launch in more ways than one, should we chance to be at cross-purposes with her again. Of that I feel assured."

"Please explain," said the detective, while Inez was no less interested. "How would we have the advantage?—apart from fighting her off at a pinch, I mean, as a matter of course."

"First, I am satisfied that the Ghost is seriously crippled—too much so to put to sea with the treasure, even if the latter were secured by her."

"I doubt that. The senora would take the risk, anyway; so that such a thing as our being forestalled must not be thought of."

"Well and good. Next, she draws too much water to get within twenty rods of the reefs, with safety to herself."

"Ah!"

"So that she would have to operate with a small boat, which would necessarily divide her fighting force in case it should come to blows."

"A good point!"

"While the Seamew, with the center-board up, can dance like a duck within a biscuit's toss of the inner reef, which the Spanish letter indicates as the one containing the buried treasure."

"I see! we shall have the advantage, as you say."

"Still," said Inez, "let us hope that we shall not be interrupted. The Ghost has lost some of its mysterious terrors for me. She looked so forlorn, and labored so uneasily, when she took Juan on board this morning, after Vasco's capture, that she no longer seemed formidable."

"There's intelligence and life in her yet, Miss Delorme," said Dago, "and let us not forget that the terrible senora herself is now the master-spirit."

"We're not likely to forget that," said the detective; "and for that reason I sincerely hope we may come at cross-purposes to-night."

"You do hope it!" cried Inez, in surprise.

"Certainly. Do you not see that such a meeting may constitute our only remaining opportunity for the capture of Juan and his mother?"

"I do see it now. They are doubtless equally responsible for the murders that took place on that terrible night."

"Let us only capture them, and that will be left to the courts."

He went on deck to find that they were slipping easily down the river.

The wind continued to freshen, and after passing Governor's Island, shortly after sunset, the gallant Seamew was laid upon a free course, with every stitch drawing and the water running back under the rail like a mill-race.

"If the wind doesn't shift," said Mr. Dago, "we ought to reach our destination by eleven o'clock. Let us go down to supper."

Inez, upon returning to the saloon, found that an unexpectedly elegant repast had been provided.

"You are having better living on the Seamew than I thought," said she, with pleased surprise.

Mr. Dago modestly explained that he had ordered the supper of a fashionable down-town restaurant, before quitting the dock-yard, in anticipation of her presence on board.

"What! you really did look for me in the expedition?" exclaimed Inez, while the discussion of the repast was forthwith begun. "That is more than Mr. Ensco did."

"Don't be so sure of that," observed the detective, with a smile.

"What, sir! did you not try your best to dissuade me from going?"

"Most assuredly, as I was in duty bound to do."

"Well?"

"But that doesn't follow that I had any idea of your permitting yourself to be dissuaded." And he laughed in a way that she could not take offense at.

"Oh, indeed! Well, perhaps I shall know just how seriously to take you hereafter."

"But really, Inez, I was nothing if not serious in my attempt to dissuade you," said the detective, gravely. "But at the same time I felt almost certain that you would over-ride my objections, no matter how strongly presented."

"Then you must take it for granted that I am a very willful and headstrong individual."

"I am partial to a strong will—in a woman."

"Even if there be danger of it clashing with your own?"

"That depends."

"Depends on what?"

"On who the woman is, and how much she may care for me and I for her."

She only replied with a pleased look, and then they both burst out laughing together.

"For my part," said John Dago, quietly, "I felt pretty sure that Miss Delorme's adventurous disposition would not fail to demand a share in

what is likely to prove the crowning enterprise of our exciting quest. And I could not help, moreover, in thinking of the old lines in her connection:

"When a woman will, she will,
You may depend on't;
And when she won't, she won't,
And there's an end on't."

Then they all laughed, and so it was in very confident spirits that they were proceeding upon this crowning adventure.

But it was destined that all should not be smooth sailing and fair-weather fortune.

Just outside the Narrows the wind shifted dead around from northwest to southeast, and thenceforth the Seamew was to have it in her teeth.

It was now past eight o'clock, and, to make matters worse, the night, prior to moon-rise, was shutting down extremely dark, with here and there but an occasional star in the fleeting interstices between masses of threatening cloud.

The lower bay seemed absolutely deserted of all sorts of craft, and even the Gravesend and Staten Island shore-lights seemed unnaturally far away, with something unreal and uncertain in their twinklings.

"The devil's in the wind!" growled Tom Gaff, who was at the wheel. "Looks like a reg'lar to-windward voyage of it, even for such a miserable little one-horse run!"

"It is worse luck than we had a right to expect," admitted Mr. Dago. "But growling won't better it."

Inez, who had also come on deck with Ensco, looked a little anxious.

"Still," she asked, "we shall reach the reefs in time, shall we not?"

"Oh, yes, without a doubt, I hope," replied the yacht-captain, cheerfully. "That is, unless a regular southeast gale should set in, which isn't at all likely at this season of the year, or—"

He hesitated.

"Or what?" demanded the young mistress of the Seamew.

"Or unless something more unforeseen should interfere," he added, with less hopefulness.

"How provoking you are! You might as well have answered at once, 'Oh, yes, we're bound to get there, Eli—that is, if we don't!'"

Dago laughed.

"Well, but candidly, Miss Delorme, can anything better be predicted of almost every enterprise in which we take the chances?"

"Perhaps not. But you might specify the 'something yet more unforeseen' that may interfere."

"There it is now—look!"

It was her lover-detective who spoke, and he was pointing away through the gloom with his hand.

A graceful black craft, with a single red lantern, like a bloodshot eye at her prow, was silently forging past them, headed for the open sea.

"It is the Ghost!" faltered the young girl, instinctively drawing closer to his side.

There was no denying it.

Their witch-like water-enemy was once more unmistakably on hand.

CHAPTER XL.

ROCKAWAY REEF.

MR. DAGO was, however, rubbing his hands together after a rather reassuring manner of his.

"It is all right!" he said, softly. "It is all right enough!"

"It is also well to have a sanguine disposition," observed Inez, a little sarcastically. "Steam isn't a bit superior to sails in a head-wind, as a matter of course. Oh, no!"

"You are unnecessarily ironical, Miss Delorme," said the captain, with his smile.

"Are you sure of that?"

"Quite sure. A mere glance should convince you that the sea-witch, that has caused us so much trouble, is no longer to be greatly feared."

"That is true," interposed the detective, studying the receding outline of the Ghost's stern. "Every movement is labored. There is scarcely a trace of the silent ease and fleetness that used to mystify and incense us."

"Oh, she's a hopeless cripple, and the devil himself, though she be his pet craft, couldn't help her in a gale. I tell you, it's all right!"

Here the Seamew went over on her starboard tack, the hillocky water seething under her counter like a cataract.

"But, barring the gale," said Inez, "won't she reach the reefs before us?"

"Undoubtedly, if she doesn't blow up," responded Dago. "But the tide hurries and waits for no man—nor woman, either."

"It will be well," muttered the detective, with a resumption of his satisfied look. "We shall have another chance at the Ghost, treasure or no treasure."

"Desperate as the senora must be," said Inez, after a reflective pause, "I do not think she would try to go out to sea, under any circumstances."

"Why not?"

"Do you forget that she has but one twin with her? Even Juan would not, I am certain, listen to a proposition to leave Vasco behind."

"I am not so sure of that."

"But, whatever their faults and crimes, the brothers are devoted to each other."

"Granted. But Vasco has still a chance of escaping conviction. There is no tell-tale sapphire-ring, nor yet a pair of mottoed bowie-knives, to plead directly against him."

"True."

"While I am satisfied that the murders of the Seamew can be swiftly brought home to both Juan and his mother."

"You still have the poison-ring?"

"Of course."

"And the two knives?"

"Yes. Oh, never fear! It is not as if Vasco were deserting his brother and mother. That would be like leaving them in the jaws of death, indeed!"

It seemed that Ensco was to prove right, and Inez wrong, so far as the intention of the Ghost was concerned.

When the Seamew came within view of the reefs at about midnight, with a stormy moon to light up the scene, the steam-yacht was waiting off the outer line, but with everything snug, and a general aspect of being ready for sea.

The Seamew was enabled, by her light draught, to obtain an inside position, and presently took in sail and came to anchor close to where the boiling and frothing water indicated the presence of the second reef, still submerged, in whose pocket the jewel-treasure was said to be buried.

The last of the ebb was hurrying out, and the two vessels, about a hundred rods apart, had the appearance of silently and jealously watching each other like animate and wary water-beasts of prey, each intent upon some anticipated quarry, and equally determined to forestall the other in the critical spring.

There was not a sign of life on the adjacent beach, ordinarily by day and evening the resort of pleasure-seeking throngs a little later in the season.

Neither was there the glimmer of a ship-light far and near, other than was displayed by the rival vessels.

Above was the storm scud of the flying rack, with the haggard moon running at hide-and-seek from rift to rift like a hunted thing; below and around nothing but the loneliness, the solitude and the savagery of sea and sand.

But Ensco and Dago had quietly formulated their plan of operation with the utmost confidence.

Scarcely did the unquiet water over the inner reef give indications of materially shallowing before the detective, accompanied by Gaff and Jones, were overboard, knee-deep in brine, and spade in hand.

True, just then, the Ghost's small boat, containing three men—in itself a confession of the weakness of the senora's force—was seen to put off, and begin to round the outer edge of the outlying reef, with the intention of disputing the digging claim, so to speak.

But a moment later, the Seamew's pinnace, with Mr. Dago himself at the helm, her small sail fluttering in the strong wind, little Starlight in the waist, and the giant form of Mingo at the prow, slanted out from under the yacht's quarter, heading away to round the inner point of the same obstruction, and thus cut off communication between the steam-yacht and her boat.

Inez, who was left alone on the Seamew, took up a position, revolver in hand, by which she could command the entire scene, and anxiously awaited developments.

Presently she uttered a satisfied exclamation.

The Ghost's boat, after a hesitating pause upon perceiving the countering tactics that were being made manifest, at length continued her course for the shallowing ledge, on which the tide-water was by this time less than ankle deep; while the pinnace, upon her part skimmed away toward the steamer, which, if all went well, would ere long experience such a disabling torpedo-shock under her sternpost as would put an end to her sea-going dreams indefinitely.

It was an intensely dramatic and exciting situation, especially for the on-looking Inez.

Her eyes were still following the pinnace, when Ensco's shout of warning almost under the yacht's rail caused her to hurry thither and look over, though crouching behind the bulwark.

The water had entirely receded from the reef, and both Gaff and Jones were digging in the sand as if for dear life, while the detective, his feet still washed by the retreating waves, was standing guard over them and holding off the Ghost's boat, now but a cable's length away, revolver in hand.

It was Juan Martez himself who was at the bow.

Inez could plainly distinguish the desperate paleness of his wild face in the moonlight, his black eyes ablaze with reckless determination, the ruddy arrow standing out on his cheek as if stamped in blood.

"Once more, Juan Martez," called out the detective, "I warn you to stand off, if you have

any regard for the lives of the perhaps innocent men with you!"

A hoarse, snarling laugh was his sole response, and Juan seemed to give an order to his followers without turning his head.

Here was a surprise.

The two oarsmen suddenly resumed their interrupted stroke, and instantly two other ruffians, heretofore lying concealed under the thwart, sprung into view at Juan's back, armed to the teeth.

Though taken aback somewhat, the detective fired on the instant, bringing one of the men heavily down over the gunwale; but as the boat bounded forward, a second attempt, with equally fatal intention, was a miss-fire.

Juan burst into his hoarse laugh again, and with his revolver, drew a point-blank bead upon the Harbor Detective's heart at less than six remaining yards.

Inez uttered a scream, and, leveling her small revolver, fired almost at random.

Juan's pistol-hand fell helpless to his side with a broken wrist.

But at that instant the boat grounded high up on the reef.

Followed pell-mell by his three remaining followers, Juan, with his revolver in his left hand, was out in a trice, and, while the detective was suddenly beset by odds, the young Honduran made a desperate attack upon Gaff and Jones, who had just succeeded in unearthing a steel-bound casket, about a foot square, whose burnished hoops or guards glistened brightly in the moonlight.

It was the jewel-chest, and for a moment there was a wild and desperate struggle for its possession.

But Inez succeeded in getting in another shot, that dashed aside Juan's revolver just as it was pressed against Gaff's ear, causing the shot to explode harmlessly; and this enabled both Gaff and Jones to fight with their spades, while the second of the two armed men, who had so suddenly sprung into view, staggered back, with an ounce-ball from the detective's six-shooter in his side.

Almost at the same time, however, a second left-handed essay on the part of Juan was successful, and Jones was down on his hands and knees, directly over the treasure-box, with the blood spurting over it from a deep wound in the shoulder.

Then Gaff began to play his spade upon the detective's two remaining assailants, while both Ensco and Juan simultaneously grasped the chest at either end.

"Hold onto it, Douglass!" screamed Inez, half-beside herself with excitement, and she was already half over the yacht's side. "I am coming to your aid!"

She then lost her footing and pitched forward, falling partly in the water and partly on the sand, but none the less firing her revolver once more as she went down.

Juan started back, dropping his end of the chest, and uttering a snarl of pain while pressing his hand to his side, where the bullet had glanced from a rib after inflicting a dangerous flesh wound.

The next instant the detective had sprung upon him like a tiger, while Inez, who had quickly scrambled to her feet, grasped the chest, dragged it from under Jones's prostrate form, and then, by a final exertion of all her strength, lifted it up in her arms, and hoisted it up over the rail upon the Seamew's deck.

Just then, however, Ensco unfortunately napped a random blow from an oar in the hands of one of his original assailants, and staggered back, relinquishing his grasp upon Juan.

Here there came the sound of firing, mingled with furious cries in a woman's voice, from the direction of the steam-launch.

"All's lost!" cried Juan, after giving one wild look. "Quick, there, you two."

And he forthwith scrambled back into the boat, after pushing her off.

CHAPTER XLI.

"LAST SCENE OF ALL."

GAFF had also been momentarily beaten back, so that his two opponents were enabled, though both were bruised and bleeding, to obey their young master's order.

In another moment the boat was hurriedly rounding out, to return to the Ghost, with Juan and his two remaining ruffians on board, and the form of the dead one still hanging limply over the gunwale.

The reef had been held, and the treasure-chest was won!

Ensco sent a last bullet after the boat, which caused the stroke-oarsman to throw up his hands with a yell, and then turned to clasp Inez in his arms, regardless of the fact that Gaff was looking on.

"Noble woman! but for you we should have been overpowered," was all he could say.

Then, Inez assisting, Jones was helped up over the yacht's side, and all were once more on the Seamew's deck, with the dearly-bought treasure at their feet.

"I'm not so bad off!" said Jones, rallying.

"I feel better already. How is the pinnace doing?"

But Inez insisted on ministering to his hurt then and there, though occasionally looking up to follow the eyes of Ensco and Gaff, which were directed to the exciting scene going on in the vicinity of the Ghost.

This may be briefly described.

The pinnace had come to a pause almost directly under her counter, and Mingo was crouching behind a heavy plank which he had raised as a shield against a succession of shots that were being poured out and down from over the steamer's taffrail by the senora and her remaining crew, four in number, she herself being conspicuous by her fierce cries, while Dago and Starlight, somewhat similarly protected by a raised plank, were managing the boat to the best of their ability, and occasionally responding with a shot or two.

At length Juan and his two men were seen to reach and be helped up over the Ghost's side.

At that same moment, however, the Seamew's pinnace, caught a fortunate puff in her sail, and was seen to dart under the overhang of the Ghost's stern.

Then there was a second pause, during which Mingo was dimly seen to reach out toward the stern-post with something dark and heavy in his hands.

He was empty-hand a moment later, when the pinnace sheered off and was away again, like a storm-bird on the wing.

The senora, with the tempestuous hood of her midnight hair streaming in the wind, was seen to wave her followers to the opposite side of the poop for a resumption of the firing upon the flying pinnace.

Then there was a flash under the steam-yacht's counter, followed by an explosion.

The entire stern seemed to be hurled high in the air, and the sea was torn piecemeal in its vicinity.

"Heavens!" exclaimed Ensco; "that is more than we intended. See! instead of merely the rudder and the screw, half the entire stern is ripped out of her."

And Gaff and he at once began hoisting the anchor and getting the Seamew under way.

"Oh, it is worse than that!" cried Inez who had by this time succeeded in making Jones a good-deal more comfortable. "Look! the Ghost is on fire!"

This was true.

By the time the Seamew had rounded out from between the reefs, and taken her pinnace and crew on board, flames were darting out from many parts of the steam-yacht.

"That's the last of her!" shouted the detective. "Lay up as close as possible, Dago. There's yet a chance of our saving some one, and Juan and his mother may yet take to the small boat."

This was accordingly done, though the captain shook his head, and the pinnace was again made ready.

But the Ghost must have had a magazine containing considerable material, for a moment later there was a terrific explosion from somewhere amidships, and she seemed to be literally torn in halves lengthwise.

The darkness was sown with flying fragments of burning material, interspersed with heavier objects, probably the mutilated forms of human beings.

One of these fell with a dull splash close under the bow of the Seamew.

It was the dead body of Juan Martez, the elder of the demon-twins.

It floated for a moment, with its blackened, distorted face, still bearing a sort of defiant menace in death, and was then borne rapidly away by the tail-end of the ebb-tide.

Inez had seen it, and she fell on her knees behind the rail, burying her face in her hands.

A shout of mingled satisfaction and horror from her companions caused her to raise her head and look again in obedience to a species of fascination.

The last recognizable fragment of the doomed steam-yacht, which comprised the greater part of her after cabin, wreathed in flames, was drifting out to sea.

In its fiery center was the terrible Senorina Zarapatta, twined round by her pet serpents, awfully beautiful, appallingly defiant to the last, her hair in the wind, her bare arms stretched out toward her pursuers in the attitude of an undying curse.

There came a fierce gust of the wind, a sort of whirling eddy, and she disappeared in a curtain of fire, to be known of men no more, save as a smoldering, rapidly fading spot, tossing afar on the bosom of the out-running tide.

"Terrible in life, terrible in death!" exclaimed Rowlock Ensco, in a solemn and impressive voice. "The world has seldom, if ever, held a more dangerous and wicked woman than she who has gone to her frightful doom. May her future reward be such as is her due, no more, no less!"

Inez had fainted.

When she recovered she was alone in the saloon of the Seamew with her lover.

The latter, while watching her restoration, had bared his right arm.

Now, catching her glance, he gazed earnestly

upon the emblem thereon tattooed, with a satisfied smile that was sufficiently significant to her.

CHAPTER XLII.

CONCLUSION.

THE murder-mystery of the yacht *Seamew* was finally unraveled, though the perpetrators of the crime were never brought to justice in the legal sense of the term.

Two days after the tragical circumstances of the *Ghost's* destruction were made public, with such sensational accompaniment as can be readily imagined, Vasco Martez was found dead in his prison-cell, the victim of a self-inflicted wound.

The suicide occasioned general surprise, as the young man had been in his usual reckless high spirits up to the last that had been seen of him alive, and he had already secured eminent legal defenders in the criminal line.

But there was no longer any surprise when it was found that he had left a written confession, which was speedily made public.

In this confession he plainly stated that his brother Juan, with five ruffianly followers, had accomplished the murder of Captain Grant Marston, his second officer and steward, together with the robbery of the jewel-treasure, and that the senorina had directly instigated the crime.

There was yet other matter embodied in the confession, the nature of which is not relevant.

It seemed that Vasco had really lost heart completely, on being informed of the terrible doom that had overtaken his mother and brother, and had then predetermined his suicide, even while keeping up an outward show of bravado and high spirits.

Inez and Enseo were married on the Fourth of July following.

They are now traveling in Europe, accompanied by Mrs. Delorme, who, in the sunshine of rehabilitated fortunes and a tender daughter's love, is once more knowing something of happiness and joy.

The gallant *Seamew* and her crew—including Sailor Jones, who speedily recovered from his wound; Mingo, whose giant strength is still the wonder of harbor and river men, and little Starlight, whose future is secure if Inez and Enseo can make it so—are yet here and there in New York waters, awaiting for whatever orders may be forthcoming from Skipper Inez, as honest John Dago insists in speaking of the proprietress.

The origin of the strange steam-launch, that has figured so prominently throughout our story, has never been determined, and she carried the secret to her grave.

Negotiations are still going on for the discovery of the original owners of the contents of the jewel-chest, but without much success; and the probability is that the gems—said to be worth a quarter of a million—will ultimately be declared the property of Inez.

But there is one heirloom that will doubtless be treasured as a strange and valuable curiosity by both Enseo and his wife.

It is a diamond-girt sapphire, in unique setting, and the poison-secret of the tiny blade that is its occult property must ever remain a souvenir of the perils and escapes that were hazarded in order to bring its companion-jewels of the stolen casket to light, when the fair young girl herself became the fairest gem in the reward vouchsafed to Rowlock Enseo, the whilom Harbor Detective.

THE END.

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- 109 Captain Kyd, the King of the Black Flag.
- 116 Black Plume; or, The Sorceress of Hell Gate.
- 121 The Sea Cadet; or, The Rover of the Rigoletts.
- 123 The Chevalier Corsair; or, The Heritage.
- 131 Buckskin Sam, the Texas Trailer.
- 134 Darkey Dan, the Colored Detective.
- 139 Fire Eye; or, The Bride of a Buccaneer.
- 147 Gold Spur, the Gentleman from Texas.
- 155 The Corsair Queen; or, The Gypsies of the Sea.
- 162 The Mad Mariner; or, Dishonored and Disowned.
- 168 Wild Bill, the Pistol Dead Shot.
- 172 Black Pirate; or, The Golden Fetters Mystery.
- 177 Don Diablo, the Planter-Corsair.
- 181 The Scarlet Schooner; or, The Sea Nemesis.
- 184 The Ocean Vampire; or, The Castle Heiress.
- 189 Wild Bill's Gold Trail; or, The Desperate Dozen.
- 198 The Skeleton Schooner; or, The Skimmer.
- 205 The Gambler Pirate; or, Lady of the Lagoon.
- 210 Buccaneer Bess, the Lioness of the Sea.
- 216 The Corsair Planter; or, Driven to Doom.
- 220 The Specter Yacht; or, A Brother's Crime.
- 224 Black Beard, the Buccaneer.
- 231 The Kid Glove Miner; or, The Magic Doctor.
- 235 Red Lightning the Man of Chance.
- 246 Queen Helen, the Amazon of the Overland.
- 255 The Pirate Priest; or, The Gambler's Daughter.
- 259 Outlaw and Cross; or, The Ghouls of the Sea.
- 261 The Sea Owl; or, The Lady Captain of the Gulf.
- 307 The Phantom Pirate; or, The Water Wolves.
- 318 The Indian Buccaneer; or, The Red Rovers.
- 325 The Gentleman Pirate; or, The Casco Hermits.
- 329 The League of Three; or, Buffalo Bill's Pledge.
- 335 The Magic Ship; or, Sandy Hook Freebooters.
- 341 The Sea Desperado.
- 346 Ocean Guerrillas; or, Phantom Midshipman.
- 362 Buffalo Bill's Grip; or, Oath Bound to Custer.
- 364 The Sea Fugitive; or, The Queen of the Coast.
- 369 The Coast Corsair; or, The Siren of the Sea.
- 373 Sailor of Fortune; or, The Barnegat Buccaneer.
- 377 Afloat and Ashore; or, The Corsair Conspirator.
- 388 The Giant Buccaneer; or, The Wrecker Witch.
- 393 The Convict Captain.
- 399 The New Monte Cristo.
- 418 The Sea Siren; or, The Fugitive Privateer.
- 425 The Sea Sword; or, The Ocean Rivals.
- 430 The Fatal Frigate; or, Rivals in Love and War.
- 435 The One-Armed Buccaneer.
- 446 Ocean Ogre, the Outcast Corsair.
- 457 The Sea Insurgent.
- 469 The Lieutenant Detective.
- 476 Bob Brent, the Buccaneer.

BY WILLIAM H. MANNING.

- 279 The Gold Dragoon, or, The California Bloodhound.
- 297 Colorado Rube, the Strong Arm of Hotspur.
- 335 Wild Dick Turpin, the Leadville Lion.
- 405 Old Baldy, the Brigadier of Buck Basin.
- 415 Hot Heart, the Detective Spy.
- 427 The Rivals of Montana Mill.
- 437 Deep Duke; or, The Man of Two Lives.
- 442 Wild West Walt, the Mountain Veteran.
- 449 Bluff Burke, King of the Rockies.
- 455 Yank Yellowbird, the Tall Hustler of the Hills.
- 463 Gold Gauntlet, the Gulch Gladiator.
- 470 The Duke of Dakota.
- 479 Gladiator Gabe, the Samson of Sassajack.

BY EDWARD WILLETT.

- 129 Mississippi Mose; or, a Strong Man's Sacrifice.
- 209 Buck Farley, the Bonanza Prince.
- 222 Bill the Blizzard; or, Red Jack's Crime.
- 248 Montana Nat, the Lion of Last Chance Camp.
- 274 Flush Fred, the Mississippi Sport.
- 289 Flush Fred's Full Hand.
- 298 Logger Lem; or, Life in the Pine Woods.
- 308 Hemlock Hank, Tough and True.
- 315 Flush Fred's Double; or, The Squatters' League.
- 327 Terrapin Dick, the Wildwood Detective.
- 337 Old Gabe, the Mountain Tramp.
- 348 Dan Dillon, King of Crosscut.
- 368 The Canyon King; or, a Price on his Head.

BY JACKSON KNOX—"Old Hawk."

- 386 Hawk Heron, the Falcon Detective.
- 424 Hawk Heron's Deputy.
- 444 The Magic Detective; or, The Hidden Hand.
- 451 Griplock, the Rocket Detective.
- 462 The Circus Detective.
- 467 Mainwaring, the Salamander.
- 477 Dead-arm Brandt.

BY BUFFALO BILL (Hon. W. F. Cody).

- 53 Death-Tracker, the Chief of Scouts.
- 83 Gold Bullet Sport; or, Knights of the Overland.
- 243 The Pilgrim Sharp; or, The Soldier's Sweetheart.
- 304 Texas Jack, the Prairie Rattler.
- 319 Wild Bill, the Whirlwind of the West.
- 394 White Beaver, the Exile of the Platte.
- 397 The Wizard Brothers; or, White Beaver's Trail.
- 401 One-Armed Pard; or, Borderland Retribution.
- 414 Red Renard, the Indian Detective.

BY JOSEPH E. BADGER, JR.

- 28 Three-Fingered Jack, the Road-Agent.
- 30 Gospel George; or, Fiery Fred, the Outlaw.
- 40 Long-Haired Pards; or, The Tartars of the Plains.
- 45 Old Bull's-Eye, the Lightning Shot.
- 47 Pacific Pete, the Prince of the Revolver.
- 50 Jack Rabbit, the Prairie Sport.
- 64 Double-Sight, the Death Shot.
- 67 The Boy Jockey; or, Honesty vs. Crookedness.
- 71 Captain Cool Blade; or, Mississippi Man Shark.
- 88 Big George; or, The Five Outlaw Brothers.
- 105 Dan Brown of Denver; or, The Detective.
- 119 Alabama Joe; or, The Yazoo Man-Hunters.
- 127 Sol Scott, the Masked Miner.
- 141 Equinox Tom, the Bully of Red Rock.
- 154 Joaquin, the Saddle King.
- 165 Joaquin, the Terrible.
- 170 Sweet William, the Trapper Detective.
- 180 Old '49; or, The Amazon of Arizona.
- 197 Revolver Rob; or, The Belle of Nugget Camp.
- 201 Pirate of the Placers; or, Joaquin's Death Hunt.
- 233 The Old Boy of Tombstone.
- 241 Spitfire Saul, King of the Rustlers.
- 249 Elephant Tom, of Durango.
- 257 Death Trap Diggings; or, A Hard Man from 'Way Back.
- 283 Sleek Sam, the Devil of the Mines.
- 286 Pistol Johnny; or, One Man in a Thousand.
- 292 Moke Horner, the Boss Roustabout.
- 302 Faro Saul, the Handsome Hercules.
- 317 Frank Lightfoot, the Miner Detective.
- 324 Old Forked Lightning, the Solitary.
- 331 Chispa Charley, the Gold Nugget Sport.
- 339 Spread Eagle Sam, the Hercules Hide Hunter.
- 345 Masked Mark, the Mounted Detective.
- 351 Nor' West Nick, the Border Detective.
- 355 Stormy Steve, the Mad Athlete.
- 360 Jumping Jerry, the Gamecock from Sundown.
- 367 A Royal Flush; or, Dan Brown's Big Game.
- 372 Captain Crisp, the Man with a Record.
- 379 Howling Jonathan, the Terror from Headwaters.
- 387 Dirk Durg, the Ishmael of the Hills.
- 395 Deadly Aim, the Duke of Derringers.
- 403 The Nameless Sport.
- 409 Rob Roy Ranch; or, The Imps of Pan Handle.
- 416 Monte Jim, the Back Sheep of Bismarck.
- 426 The Ghost Detective; or, The Spy of the Secret Service.
- 433 Laughing Leo; or, Sam's Dandy Pard.
- 438 Oklahoma Nick.
- 443 A Cool Hand; or, Pistol Johnny's Picnic.
- 450 The Rustler Detective.
- 458 Dutch Dan, the Pilgrim from Spitzenberg.
- 466 Old Rough and Ready, the Sage of Sundown.
- 474 Daddy Dead-Eye, the Despot of Dew Drop.

BY CAPTAIN HOWARD HOLMES.

- 278 Hercules Goldspur, the Man of the Velvet Hand.
- 294 Broadcloth Burt, the Denver Dandy.
- 321 California Claude, the Lone Bandit.
- 335 Flash Dan, the Nabob; or, Blades of Bowie Bar.
- 340 Cool Conrad, the Dakota Detective.
- 347 Denver Duke, the Man with "Sand."
- 352 The Desperate Dozen.
- 365 Keen Kennard, the Shasta Shadow.
- 374 Major Blister, the Sport of Two Cities.
- 382 The Bonanza Band; or, Dread Don of Cool Clan.
- 392 The Lost Bonanza; or, The Boot of Silent Hound.
- 400 Captain Coldgrip; or, The New York Spotter.
- 407 Captain Coldgrip's Nerve; or, Injun Nick.
- 413 Captain Coldgrip in New York.
- 421 Father Ferret, the Frisco Shadow.
- 434 Lucifer Lynx, the Wonder Detective.
- 441 The California Sharp.
- 447 Volcano, the Frisco Spy.
- 453 Captain Coldgrip's Long Trail.
- 460 Captain Coldgrip, the Detective.
- 458 Coldgrip in Deadwood.
- 480 Hawkspear, the Man with a Secret.

BY LEON LEWIS.

- 428 The Flying Glim; or, The Island Lure.
- 456 The Demon Steer.
- 481 The Silent Detective; or, The Bogus Nephew.

BY PERCY B. ST. JOHN.

- 57 The Silent Hunter.
- 86 The Big Hunter; or, The Queen of the Woods.

BY PHILIP S. WARNE.

- 1 A Hard Crowd; or, Gentleman Sam's Sister.
- 4 The Kidnapper; or, The Northwest Shanghai.
- 29 Tiger Dick, Faro King; or, The Cashier's Crime.
- 54 Always on Hand; or, The Foot-Hills Sport.
- 80 A Man of Nerve; or, Caliban the Dwarf.
- 114 The Gentleman from Pike.
- 171 Tiger Dick, the Man of the Iron Heart.
- 207 Old Hard Head; or, Whirlwind and his Mare.
- 251 Tiger Dick vs. Iron Despard.
- 280 Tiger Dick's Lone Hand.
- 299 Three of a Kind; or, Tiger Dick, Iron Despard and the Sportive Sport.
- 338 Jack Sands, the Boss of the Town.
- 359 Yellow Jack, the Mestizo.
- 380 Tiger Dick's Pledge; or, The Golden Serpent.
- 404 Silver Sid; or, A "Daisy" Bluff.
- 431 California Kit, the Always on Hand.
- 472 Six Foot Si; or, The Man to "Tie To."

BY ALBERT W. AIKEN.

- 27 The Spotter Detective; or, Girls of New York.
- 31 The New York Sharp; or, The Flash of Lightning.
- 33 Overland Kit; or, The Idyl of White Pine.
- 34 Rocky Mountain Rob, the California Outlaw.
- 35 Kentuck the Sport; or, Dick Talbot of the Mines.
- 36 Injun Dick; or, The Death-Shot of Shasta.
- 38 Velvet Hand; or, Injun Dick's Iron Grip.
- 41 Gold Dan; or, The White Savage of Salt Lake.
- 42 The California Detective; or, The Witches of N.Y.
- 49 The Wolf Demon; or, The Kanawha Queen.
- 56 The Indian Mazeppa; or, Madman of the Plains.
- 59 The Man from Texas; or, The Arkansas Outlaw.
- 63 The Winged Whale; or, The Red Rupert of Gulf.
- 72 The Phantom Hand; or, The 5th Avenue Heiress.
- 75 Gentleman George; or, Parlor, Prison and Street.
- 77 The Fresh of Frisco; or, The Heiress.
- 79 Joe Phenix, the Police Spy.
- 81 The Human Tiger; or, A Heart of Fire.
- 84 Hunted Down; or, The League of Three.
- 91 The Winning Oar; or, The Innkeeper's Daughter.
- 93 Captain Dick Talbot, King of the Road.
- 97 Bronze Jack, the California Thoroughbred.
- 101 The Man from New York.
- 107 Richard Talbot, of Cinnabar.
- 112 Joe Phenix, Private Detective.
- 130 Captain Volcano; or, The Man of Red Revolver.
- 161 The Wolves of New York; or, Joe Phenix's Hunt.
- 173 California John, the Pacific Thoroughbred.
- 196 La Marmoset, the Detective Queen.
- 203 The Double Detective; or, The Midnight Mystery.
- 252 The Wall Street Blood; or, The Telegraph Girl.
- 320 The Genteel Spotter; or, The N. Y. Night Hawk.
- 349 Iron-Hearted Dick, the Gentleman Road-Agent.
- 354 Red Richard; or, The Crimson Cross Brand.
- 363 Crowningshield, the Detective.
- 370 The Dusky Detective; or, Pursued to the End.
- 376 Black Beards; or, The Rio Grande High Horse.
- 381 The Gypsy Gentleman; or, Nick Fox, Detective.
- 384 Injun Dick, Detective; or, Tracked to New York.
- 391 Kate Scott, the Decoy Detective.
- 408 Doc Grip, the Vendetta of Death.
- 419 The Bat of the Battery; or, Joe Phenix, Detective.
- 423 The Lone Hand; or, The Red River Recreants.
- 440 The High Horse of the Pacific.
- 461 The Fresh on the Rio Grande.
- 465 The Actor Detective.
- 475 Chin Chin, the Chinese Detective.

LATEST AND NEW ISSUES.

- 482 Ocean Tramps. By Col. P. Ingraham.
- 483 Flush Fred, the River Sharp. By Ed. Willett.
- 484 Captain Ready, the Red Ransomer. By Leon Lewis.
- 485 Rowlock, the Harbor Detective. By Jackson Knox. Ready February 8.
- 486 Kansas Kitten, the Northwest Detective. By Wm. H. Manning. Ready February 15.
- 487 Sunshine Sam, a Chip of the Old Block. By Capt. Howard Holmes. Ready February 22.
- 488 The Thoroughbred Sport. By Jos. E. Badger, Jr. Ready February 29.
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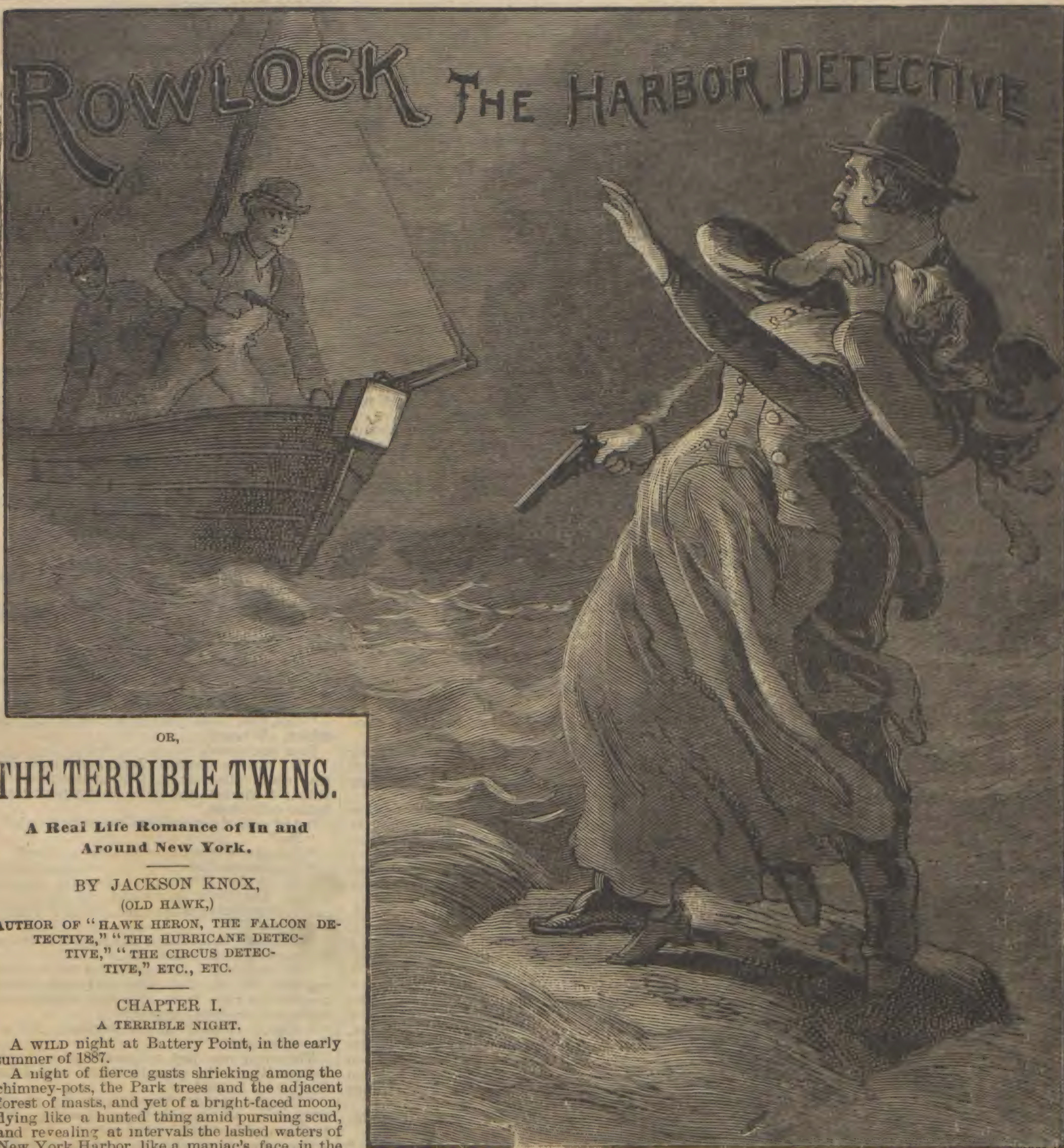
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OR,

THE TERRIBLE TWINS.

A Real Life Romance of In and
Around New York.

BY JACKSON KNOX,
(OLD HAWK.)

AUTHOR OF "HAWK HERON, THE FALCON DE-
TECTIVE," "THE HURRICANE DETEC-
TIVE," "THE CIRCUS DETEC-
TIVE," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

A TERRIBLE NIGHT.

A WILD night at Battery Point, in the early
summer of 1887.

A night of fierce gusts shrieking among the
chimney-pots, the Park trees and the adjacent
forest of masts, and yet of a bright-faced moon,
flying like a hunted thing amid pursuing scud,
and revealing at intervals the lashed waters of
New York Harbor, like a maniac's face in the
soft luster of a silver lamp.

A wild night for an open boat to be abroad on

"DOG OF A DETECTIVE!" HE CRIED; "THINK YOU TO SLEUTH US FOREVER WITH
YOUR CURSED CUNNING?"

the waters, and a yet wilder for a graceful female figure to choose that lonely, crime-infested sea-wall for its promenade.

Yet, such was the case.

The young lady—her youth and breeding were apparent by her dress and carriage, though her face was veiled—had but newly alighted from the Elevated Railroad terminus.

She was now pacing the esplanade fronting the sea-wall, heedless of the questioning looks of a few suspicious lurkers in the vicinity, and with her eyes anxiously fastened upon the approaching boat.

The latter was presently seen to be occupied by two men—a medium-sized, deep-chested and athletic young man, with an authoritative air, and a gigantic negro of herculean proportions.

They had lowered their sail and taken in their oars, the flood tide enabling them to pull in close in under the parapet, without the intervention of a float or bridge.

The young lady presently stooped under the wall-chain in her eagerness, and stood on the extreme outer edge.

The strong gale fluttered her dark garments to one side, while compressing it on the other, to the revelation of her tall, graceful and yet girlish figure, and streamed out her long, fleecy veil like a gauzy pennant.

Presently, as the boat was brought to, she made a swift signal with her ungloved hand.

It was immediately responded to in kind by the young man in the boat.

Then the young lady called out in a rich, clear voice, that was none the less wary and cautious:

"What are you, sir?"

"The Scud," was answered; and then, "What are you for?"

"The Seamew."

"Correct. Anything else?"

"Yes. Captain Grant Marston."

"And you?"

"I am Inez Delorme, the pilot's granddaughter."

"Right again."

"And you?"

"Rowlock Ensco, the Harbor Detective, at Miss Delorme's service."

Inez Delorme made a satisfied gesture, and nimbly seated herself on the edge of the wall, her feet coming within a few inches of the mimic breakers that dashed below.

A crafty action of the oars on the part of the giant negro fetched the boat's stern, in which Rowlock Ensco was standing erect, hovering uneasily directly beneath her position.

The young man stood like a rock, and opened wide his arms.

"The rocks are dangerous hereabouts, and there is no time for ceremony," said he. "Miss Delorme, you must jump for it."

Instantly, and without hesitation, she cleverly threw herself out from the wall.

She was as cleverly caught, steadied, and seated, while Ensco placed himself at the rudder near her.

"Give way, Mingo!" he ordered.

And, still under the negro's powerful strokes, they headed out over the somber, storm-lashed bay.

At times there was nothing but the fitful moonshine, and then again but a rocking ship-light, to show them their way, and yet the detective kept a stern and anxious outlook on every side, as if in precaution against some much dreaded observation or pursuit.

Was it an elopement, or a midnight flight from secret enemies, that so much mystery was preserved?

Certainly not the former, and not altogether the latter; and yet the stealthy departure had been attended by an incident which would have increased the anxiety of both the young lady and her escort, had they but known of it.

While the mysterious watchwords were being exchanged, a well-known river-thief—one of those lurkers in the night who had been furtively watching Inez Delorme's movements on the esplanade—had crept unperceived to within earshot.

The instant after she had sprung into the boat he had sped crouching away toward the boat-landing in the shadow of the United States Barge Office. A lantern was waved thrice, and then, almost before the detective's boat was fairly headed out, a small but stanch sail-boat, crowded with desperate men, had shaken out her leg-of-mutton sail from under the stone pier, and flitted like a storm-bird straight out into the turbulent and uncertain waste.

"Give 'em ample sea-room, Jago," cautioned, with a slightly foreign accent, a slender young man, who seemed to be in command of the mysterious craft, to the man at the rudderlines. "If we intercept them anywhere this side of the Seamew, it will answer. *Caramba*, what a night!"

"*Bueno*, señor!" was the equally guarded answer. "Will that give Señor Juan time for the part he is to play?"

"*Por Dios*, I should say so! The treasure is his lookout, as the young lady is mine, and we have exchanged oaths as to our mutual fidelity. Though, *carajo*!" in a lower and half-grum-

bling voice, "I fancy he has the better bargain of the two, where danger is reckoned."

"Yes, señor," softly assented the steersman, "for but one treasure at a time can be under the escort of Rowlock, the Harbor Detective—a thousand maledictions on him and his!"

Here there was a chorus of laughs and oaths growled, like an echo of the curse, from the desperadoes in the body of the boat.

This was silenced by a fierce exclamation, accompanied by a commanding gesture, from the slender young man.

After that, silent and lightless, the sinister craft swept on, careening almost flat upon her side as she rounded Governor's Island, and gradually vanishing amid the weltering hurry and tumult of the central bay.

In the mean time, the occupants of the Scud, as the detective's boat was named, had proceeded more leisurely on their way, without suspecting the treachery preparing for them.

After standing well out from shore, the sail had been loosened to the gale, and the little craft was fairly dancing over the waves.

"I rather think the coast is clear now," said Ensco, cheerily. "If you do not become seasick, Miss Delorme, all should go well till you are safe with your grandfather on the gallant Seamew."

"I am too much of a sailor to fear the *mal de mer*, Mr. Ensco," was the collected reply from behind the fluttering veil. "But," a little anxiously, "isn't this a rather small boat for—for such stormy work?"

He laughed reassuringly as the Scud feathered the foam-crest of an unusually big wave, only to spring, apparently, upon another, with scarcely a subsidence into the intervening trough.

"No fear of that," said he. "The Scud is of a life-boat pattern, and fairly unsinkable, I think."

Then there was a pause, in which they had a chance to study each other at leisure, though the young lady had availed herself of that the very first.

She secretly confessed that the young man's appearance was not a little in his favor.

But was he altogether a young man?

His fairness of feature, with his curling brown mustache and thick-crisping light hair, was certainly indicative of the care-free frankness of early manhood. But, there were stern lines about the cool, steadfast gray eyes that might speak of long experience and adventurous antecedents.

As it was, she could only set his years at almost anywhere between twenty-five and forty.

For the rest, he was about five feet nine, with almost any muscular and gymnastic possibilities underneath the careless boatman's costume of navy blue that he wore so becomingly.

"There was yet another caution that my grandfather gave me," said Inez, at last.

"I can guess what it was," replied Ensco, with his engaging laugh. "How suspicious is the old sea-dog!"

"Can you blame him for that?"

"Not I." His brow contracted, and he again threw a searching glance around over the tumbling waters. "With the powerful machinations of such accomplished scoundrels as those dare-devil grand-nephews of his, Juan and Vasco Martez, to be guarded against—but really I beg your pardon, miss! They must be your own cousins."

An impatient gesture of the ungloved treasure of a hand.

"You said you could guess my grandfather's parting caution."

"So I can. It was this: After you were fairly afloat with me, as now, you were to make assurance doubly sure by demanding a final proof that I am I."

"That was it." With a shade of suppressed curiosity.

The moon passed under a cloud. Its recurring effulgence showed the detective to have stripped his right arm to the shoulder, while steadying the rebellious tiller with the left.

It was a magnificent arm thus bared to view—shapely as a duchess's, with a skin seemingly smooth and hard as marble, masking thews and sinews of corded steel, and none the less snowy of surface, save for a remarkable representation, spreading from wrist to shoulder in deep, varied and indelible tattoo.

It was that of an athlete and a serpent, wreathed in deadly conflict for the mastery, while from a thunder-cloud was descending a crimson arrow, blazoned with the scriptural injunction, "*Vengeance is Mine*!"

Inez bowed her head in acquiescence.

She had merely time to note that the pictured wrestler, albeit in classic semi-nudity, was a passable portrait of the young man before her, while the serpent countenance was strikingly suggestive of an infuriated woman's head and face, beautiful, yet fiendishly malignant, when the uprolled sleeve was replaced, and the strange exhibition was at an end.

The detective had grown grave and thoughtful.

"You are now to satisfy me in your turn," said he, in a low voice.

"That I am I?"

"Yes."

"What did my grandfather tell you should be the test on my part?"

"I can only answer when I shall have seen your face."

She hesitated an instant, and then threw back her veil.

Rowlock Ensco uttered a low cry, and then clasped his hands.

The cry was expressive of amazed admiration, the action of combined wonder, incredulosity and even resentment, while his handsome face was the mirror of these conflicting emotions.

The admiration was natural enough—as natural as that evoked by the inimitable sun-burst in the skylark's worshipping hymn.

Such a face is seldom vouchsafed to the privileged gaze as was then and there revealed for the first time to the enraptured detective.

An angelic face, purely American in its exquisite fairness (a healthful, lamp-like pallor, is the better distinction), statuesque chiseling and pronounced individuality; Spanish in the soulful duskiness of the large, well-like eyes, with the perfect brows and long-bent lashes of jetty silkiness, and in the rich wavy masses of blue-black hair, to say nothing of the perfect figure's airy and majestic pose.

The gazer's resentment, or mortification, if such it could be called, was more inexplicable.

That the owner of so much loveliness thought so was speedily apparent.

"I see that you, sir, are also satisfied," said she, after quickly replacing her veil, while the moonlight that had transiently assisted the revelation was a thing of the past.

"Perfectly," was the low-voiced and constrained answer.

"And yet—there was something wanting?"

"Not that—something unexpected."

"I do not understand."

"I was prepared to find in the pilot's granddaughter a beauty little short of superhuman. In that way, the revelation was a fulfillment of the test that Captain Marston advised me of."

"Ah!" a little disdainfully.

"Yes. 'The enemy,' said the old sea-wolf, 'cannot, with all their cunning, impose any feminine counterfeit upon you, if you but once look in Inez Delorme's face. Its beauty is unexampled, its loveliness richer than mortal man's intensest dream.'"

"Well?" This with a touch of amusement.

"Well, the conditions of the test are fulfilled. There can be one Inez Delorme, and you are she."

"Still, you were disappointed."

"No—startled."

"That was it. Why?"

"Does not your own face suggest another to your mind?"

"Not that I can recall. A likeness, do you mean?"

"Yes; or rather a suggestion."

"Say, a likeness, then."

"So be it. A likeness almost equally beautiful, and yet older and terrible—terrible, malevolent and deadly."

His words were earnest and mournful. The young girl made an agitated movement.

"Be more explicit. My features suggest a resemblance to what others?"

His bent nearer to hers in the darkness.

"Did you mark the woman-face of the serpent on my arm?"

Her agitation was now unmistakable.

"Good heavens, yes!" she faltered. "And—Ah, the likeness was there! I see it now. What entangling mystery is this?"

"None, believe me, to ensnare such purity as yours. But complete your broken sentence. And—what?"

"Alas! sir, I am terrified. I know not."

"Yes, yes; the serpent-face likewise suggested others. Whose?"

Inez shuddered.

"My cousins and foes, Juan and Vasco Martez," she replied, in a low, scarcely audible voice. "The infernal twins, as my poor grandfather calls them."

"Ah! and of none other face—a woman's?"

"No."

"Not of one who might be their mother?"

"The Senora Zarapatta Martez, surnamed the White Sibyl of Morona, is personally unknown to me. That terrible woman can never have cast her baleful eyes upon me. Wait! And yet—and yet—"

Her hand was pressing her forehead, and she was now trembling violently.

"Go on, go on, I beseech!" cried the detective, eagerly. "I see that some early and dreadful recollection rises from oblivious depths to the surface of memory. Speak!"

"Alas, I cannot! I am terrified! All is so vague, so awful!"

The moon was just reappearing, and at that instant Mingo, the gigantic negro, roared from his lookout in the bow:

"Danger ahead! Stand fast! By Cracky! it's jess as you feared, Marse Rowlock. Here they are, almos' on board of us!"

The renewed moonlight showed the ruffian-crammed pursuing craft toppling on a huge wave, bow-on, hardly a cable's length away.

"Tracked at last, and by Vasco Martez and his crew!" exclaimed Inez, in an appalled tone. "Now Heaven be with me!"

CHAPTER II.

INEZ DELORME.

THE boats had perceived each other at the same instant.

There was a chorus of exultant yells from the larger craft—such as might have been suddenly unmasked upon a trembling and defenseless merchant man from an old-time cut-throat cruiser of the Spanish Main, with the ominous black flag unexpectedly flung from her peak.

Then the commander, Vasco Martez, the graceful and slender young man whom the reader has already had a glimpse of, sprung erect in the stern, a glistening revolver in his right hand.

"Hold hard to grapple 'em!" he shouted. "If the young lady is surrendered unresistingly, no violence shall be offered."

Save calling out a few words in a low, distinct tone to Mingo, the detective had as yet said nothing, but was sitting calmly with both rudder and sail under his perfect control.

"Crouch a little lower under the gunwale, and fear nothing," he now muttered reassuringly to the trembling Inez, who mutely obeyed. "Our coat is of steel, and theirs of wood. There is nothing whatever to fear, as you shall presently see."

At this instant the Scud was sheered off slantingly, as if by magic, just as the enemy came broadside-on, less than a yard distant, and with every desperado springing to his feet, preparing to lay aboard.

"Now, Mingo!" called out Ensco, the words quitting his lips like pistol-shots. "Now!"

Instantly the gigantic negro was on his feet, armed with an enormous belaying pin, from whose square-blunted end a short, keen knife-blade protruded.

He was like an incarnate fiend.

With one lightning-like sweep of the huge pin and knife, the crowded line of ruffians along the hostile gunwale were sent tumbling down like a row of bricks.

A second, up-and-down stroke split the great sail, from gaff to spanker-boom, as it flopped over in the heel of the wave, and then the Night Hawk, as the predatory craft was fitly named, went drifting helplessly astern, without a single grapple having caught.

"Steady!" called out the Harbor Detective's collected voice. "That will do for the present, Mingo. Now, again!"

The Scud, obedient to the rudder as a swift courser to the master-hand, had tacked as if by magic, and now, poised like an avenging bird on the summit of a huge wave, was hovering, prow-on, over the helpless Night Hawk, while the boom swung easily around to catch the fullness on her quarter.

Vasco Martez, white with baffled fury, leveled his revolver at the detective's breast.

"Everlasting Marplot! Hound of a detective!" he snarled; "my mother's, no less than my own and my brother's, wrongs upon your accursed head! Die in your tracks!"

The unsteady weapon missed fire, and there was no chance for a second essay.

At that instant the Scud shot forward and down like a bolt, her steel prow cutting through the Night Hawk directly amidships, and then recoiling from the shock, went on with scarcely a moment's pause.

"Ensco, beware!" yelled Vasco Martez, a moment or two later, from his clinging hold upon a fragment of the wreck. "Juan has ere this seized the treasure chest, Inez shall yet be mine, and the witch-faced serpent of your accursed emblem shall yet triumph in the strife."

The detective might have been of marble, for all of response by word or sign, and the wreckage was soon left far behind.

Inez had buried her face in her hands.

"Weep not, lady!" said Rowlock, with indescribable gentleness. "Your danger is a thing of the past."

She raised her face, unvailed now, showing that it was agitated, but tearless.

"It is not the danger—that is over and done for us," she murmured. "But ah! those struggling wretches in the water!"

"They'll be picked up, never fear—more's the pity!" in a hard, contemptuous tone.

"But then my Cousin Vasco's parting threat! Oh! if the treasure *should* be gone—if something dreadful should have happened on the Seamew!"

And she shuddered again, while her great eyes questioned him eagerly.

"A pitiful coward's boastful prediction, in which the hope was father to the words—nothing more! Give it not another thought!"

Then, seeing that she was somewhat relieved, his own face was expressive of eagerness, painfully expressed.

"Our fates seem to be closely associated, through our common foes," said he, guardedly—"more closely than I could have supposed."

"So it would seem. Ah! that mysterious allusion to the tattooed emblem on your arm! What can it mean?"

"You shall some time have its solution—that is, should you desire it."

"Desire it!"

"But"—a little timidly—"might not your own history be more to the point, in view of present complications?"

She looked at him hesitatingly.

"My grandfather has perfect confidence in you. He has told me so. Has he not been explicit in his explanations to you?"

"No. Captain Marston has thus far given me but a faint outline of the perils that threaten you. Perhaps he opined that his granddaughter would be more—more trustful."

She had been gravely studying his features in the moonlight.

"You can be velvet or steel, scabbard or blade, at need," she murmured, half to herself. "After what has happened to-night, I feel that I can trust you."

"I am sure you can."

They were just entering the Narrows, though laboriously against a strong head-wind, the gale having shifted several points, and the short, thumping seas running yet more vexatiously.

The moon and stars were yet more chary of their uncertain light, though far away in the East the increased somberness was but premonitory of a new day's dawn.

It was under these circumstances, and quite suddenly, without further persuasion, as though under an impulse she refused to restrain, that Inez began to recount her brief but eventful history.

"Captain Marston, as you doubtless know, is my grandfather on my mother's side. Whether I am an orphan or not I do not know. I have an indistinct recollection of my father and mother. But all is confused, and they somehow faded out of my life. If they are dead, I know nothing of their graves; if still living, their whereabouts is no less a mystery—that is to me. On this subject alone, a subject that is naturally vital to me, my grandfather, though in everything else so kind, so tender, so more than indulgent, has ever been morosely, inexorably silent. You know his iron mood when once crystallized into permanency. To say that all mention of the topic, so dear to my heart, so haunting to my soul, has been interdicted is not enough. Between my grandfather and me, it has been as though entombed, or, rather, as unborn and non-existent. I have lived with my grandfather as long as I can remember. He has been all in all to me. As the old pilot's granddaughter, I have been his petted treasure, my every caprice gratified, my slightest wish his law. Perhaps it is well for both him and me that my nature is not an exacting one. Otherwise, I might have been spoiled and he rendered unhappy by my waywardness."

She smiled a little sadly, and then, perceiving the rapt earnestness of her auditor's attention, colored a little and proceeded more hurriedly.

"Those earlier years of mine with my good old grandfather were of unalloyed happiness, though spent in comparative seclusion in his old yellow mansion and grounds on the breezy riverbank, near the foot of East Eighty-sixth street, whose locality you are perhaps acquainted with."

Ensco bowed his head.

"With himself, old Mrs. Twiggs, his housekeeper, and the few servants, I was as happy and care-free as the day was long. Whether out on the river fishing with grandpapa, the companion of his cruises in the Seamew, skurrying away over the new-made streets and old lanes on my Mexican pony, devising home-sports with my few playmates of the neighborhood (in which grandpapa likewise seldom failed to participate,) or in practising my studies under my visiting governess or under my various tutors, he also being mostly present, it was a gay and sweet life, that life of my early girlhood, such as I may never know again. Then"—she sighed deeply—"my second cousins, the twins, Juan and Vasco Martez, became members of our household, and there was a change—such a change!"

"When was that?" Ensco questioned eagerly, as she came to a troubled pause. "Pardon my impulsiveness, but the time may be of importance to me. About how old were you then?"

"Eight or nine, I should say; and I am now nineteen."

"So! And the particulars of their arrival—would you object to stating some of them?"

"Not at all."

"They arrived from—?"

"From somewhere in Mexico or Honduras, I am uncertain which."

"You will excuse the apparent importunity of my interrogations?"

"Pray, proceed."

"How are you related to those young men?"

"They are the sons of a niece of my grandfather's, the daughter of a wayward sister of his, so I have understood, by a Spanish marriage. She had married General Martez, a Mexican revolutionist of some distinction, I believe, Juan and Vasco being the fruit of the union."

A look of hatred flashed over the detective's face.

"She, their mother—you have never met, then?"

"Thank Heaven, no! at least, not to my knowledge."

"And yet to-night you have alluded to her by name—the Senora Zarapatta Martez, surnamed the White Sibyl of Morona."

Inez gave a little shiver.

"That terrible woman! yes, by reputation she is known to me."

"The twins, how old were they on their arrival at your grandfather's?"

"About sixteen—almost double my own age at that time, I should say."

"Yet they came not alone?"

"No. They were accompanied by a tall and graceful woman, whom I took to be a nurse or trusted dependent. Her face was almost constantly concealed, like that of a nun, with white wrappings, as though she might be a sufferer from neuralgia, and my grandfather seemed to dislike her, almost to abhorrence."

"Aha! and doubtless with reason. What do you recollect of her?"

"But little, for she was with us only two days, and seemed to avoid me. But I overheard her and my grandfather in several stormy interviews. They were mostly carried on in the Spanish tongue, with which I was not then familiar. But sometimes they spoke in English."

"Enough to give you an inkling of their dispute?"

"Yes."

"And that was—?"

"The disposition of a treasure chest of superb gems, which the woman and boys had brought with them, and given into Captain Marston's care. It was the same that has caused all the trouble since—that he is even now so anxious to carry out of their reach in the Seamew."

"Ah! and this treasure?"

"It consisted of priceless state and other jewels, and had been sent for safe-keeping to Captain Marston by General Martez, as the chief proceeds of some partly successful Central American revolution in which he was then engaged."

"Well?"

"Dona Anita, as the strange woman called herself, wanted my grandfather to convert the jewels into cash without delay, for the benefit of the twins and herself, as their guardian. This he steadfastly refused to do, claiming that to do so would be to betray the trust reposed in him by General Martez, of whom he seemed to have a high opinion. Hence the disputes—for he had secured the treasure beyond the woman's reach directly upon receiving it. Dona Anita at last took herself off very abruptly, leaving the lads with us."

"And you never saw the strange woman's face?"

"But once—by the merest accident—and that was once too often. Oh, it was terrible!"

"In what way?"

"Oh, it was so beautiful and yet so corpse-like, and with the expression of a fiend! She was fresh from one of those baffling interviews with my grandfather, and her lineaments, from which she had inadvertently torn the coverings, were distorted with such evil passions as I had not deemed could find a lodgment in the human breast. Ah! the face of a demoness—a tigress—a serpent! It haunts me yet."

Inez shuddered, and bowed her face in her hands.

When she looked up, Rowlock had again bared his tattooed arm to her gaze.

"Was it a countenance resembling *this*?"

And he indicated the woman-face of the serpent in the emblem.

Inez gazed with starting eyes.

"Yes, yes! Heavens! why did I not connect the two before? The same, the same!"

The detective replaced the sleeve.

"Child, it was no nurse-woman's face that was revealed to you," he exclaimed, in a deep, impressive voice. "You then made the acquaintance of the fiend-mother of the demon twins. Dona Anita and the Senora Zarapatta Martez were one and the same!"

"Ha! are you sure?"

"Perfectly sure."

"What! I have really looked, then, in the face of that terrible woman—that beautiful monster?"

"Truly; and well may you designate her a monster. Do you know what she did after leaving her precious twins in Captain Marston's care?"

"I know nothing."

"She hurried back to Honduras, secretly sold her own husband, the unfortunate General Martez, into the hands of his enemies for a round sum, and he was executed the next day at sunrise in Comayagua."

"Oh, shame, horror!"

"But the unvarnished truth. Since that infamy, as the White Sibyl of Morona, she has mostly lived like a sorcerer-queen in her mountain retreat of the Cordilleras, loathed but dreaded, on the proceeds of her treachery, her sole remaining desires, to repossess herself of the jeweled treasure, through the villainous agency of her sons, to get *you* in her clutches as the

bride of one of them, she doubtless cares not which, and—to accomplish *my* destruction."

Inez gazed at the speaker with renewed interest in the midst of her terror.

"You, too!" she murmured. "Is your fate, then, so inextricably blended with mine?"

He gravely bowed his head, and then extended his hand.

"It is even so! Lady, I would be your champion to the end, whatever that may be. Is it a compact? If so, give me your fair hand upon it."

She seemed to hesitate.

"Perhaps I cannot blame you," said the detective, mournfully. "This hand, in which I ask you to place your own, is not unstained with blood, though never yet—I swear it!—save in self-defense or in a righteous cause."

With a sudden impulse, she placed her hand in his.

He reverently raised it to his lips, while turning his eyes aloft, at the same time murmuring an invocation under his breath, and both felt that a solemn compact had been sealed.

"It is well," said the detective, with intense thankfulness. "Inez Delorme, come what may, you are from this hour not alone in the troubles that seem thickening around you—Rowlock Ensco is henceforth your adviser, your friend and your champion to the bitter end!"

"I gratefully accept you as such, sir," answered the young girl, fervently. "And may Providence speed the virtuous, the weak and the wronged in whatever trials Fate may have in store for us!"

"Amen! Now a few questions more will elicit the more important elements of your past history."

"Put them to me."

"How long did the twins remain with your grandfather?"

"Until their twentieth year."

"What was their behavior?"

"That of unconscionable ingrates! Iniquity is ingrained in their natures. They were wild, cruel and lawless from the first. They repeatedly forged my grandfather's signature to checks for inconsiderable amounts, besides attempting criminal practices of a much graver sort, and were as often forgiven—perforce you might almost say. For they resemble each other so exactly—a slight birth-mark on Juan's left cheek being almost the sole distinction between them—as to nearly defy the bringing home of any misdemeanor to them separately, and they were shrewd enough to attempt no considerable mischief in unison."

"That tell-tale birth-mark—the crimson poniard—on the elder's cheek, how well do I know it!"

Here a cheery call from Mingo, at the bow, apprised them that the Seamew was at last in sight.

In the growing light of the new day, they could see her rocking gently at her anchorage in the quiet waters under the lee of the Fort Wadsworth water-battery, a little to the south of the Clifton, or lower Staten Island Ferry landing.

CHAPTER III.

THE TREASURE-CHEST.

BUT, as considerable tacking and rough sailing were still necessary before reaching the yacht, the Harbor Detective resumed his interrogations.

"What, may I ask, was the cause of the young men's final dismissal from your grandfather's household, Miss Delorme?"

Inez colored furiously, as if under a particularly exasperating recollection.

"They dismissed themselves—fled under the cover of night, like the ignominious felons that they were—or it would have been the worse for them. Otherwise, grandpapa would have prosecuted them mercilessly—they had at last overleaped the bounds of his forgiveness!"

"And the cause?"

"There was more than one. Even at that age, they had become associated with organized bands of river thieves and other desperate characters—much the same class as their money and fearlessness now enable them to enlist in their service. More than this, grandpapa discovered that they had been constantly in secret communication with their infamous mother."

"To what end?"

"Ah! can you not guess? To gain possession of the jewel-chest at any cost. It was my grandfather's timely detection of a plot, on the part of Juan and Vasco, doubtless with the connivance of outside confederates, to murder him in his bed, in order to get at the strong room containing the treasure, that terrified and confused them at last. In fact, every member of the household, with the single exception of my poor self (I was marked as a chief part of the booty, it seemed) was to be assassinated in cold blood."

"Monstrous! No wonder they fled on the exposure of such a plot."

"Yet there was something that my grandfather found yet more unpardonable. The exposure was indirectly brought about by—"

She hesitated, and the detective, whose eyes were thoughtfully lowered, could not see the

blush of indignant shame that was mantling the pure face.

"By what?" he asked.

"By—by an indignity offered to me by Vasco. Though but thirteen, I—I had the appearance of being much older, and—and—"

"The scoundrel! Say no more of it. Oh, how can you forgive my want of tact—my brutal inconsiderateness?"

She made a disclaiming gesture, and quickly recovered her composure.

"Then," continued the detective, after a long pause, "you had no further trouble with the rascally pair until their recent reappearance in New York?"

"No; nor so much as any knowledge of them. Indeed, my grandfather had begun to hope that the senora and her sons had given over all designs upon the treasure, and decided to leave him in peace. But the first of the recent attempts to break into our house, and get at the strong room, opened his eyes rudely enough to the false security into which he had lulled himself. Threatening anonymous letters, in one or another of the brothers' handwriting, followed, and these were succeeded by the two other house-breaking attempts, of which you are doubtless aware."

The detective nodded.

"You know my grandfather's old-fashioned prejudice against banks and similar institutions," resumed Inez. "After these last attempts upon the treasure, I became so alarmed for his safety that I renewed my oft-repeated entreaties that he would place the dangerous fascination forever beyond the cupidity of those cunning, powerful, and persistent foes by consigning it to the robber-proof vaults of a safe deposit company. But, no; he would not hear of it. It was then, however, that he consented to allay my fears by advancing the Quixotic scheme—an idea, for all the world, of just such an impracticable, dear, darling old sea rover as he is—of which our present perilous harbor expedition is one of the primary steps. Accompanied by you and me, together with such of his old yachting crew as have been in his pay for years, and what other seamen might be demanded, he would carry the treasure far away in the old Seamew to a lone island bank that he knew of in the Caribbean sea. There he would bury it in a secret spot with his own hands. And there it should remain undisturbed forever, or until its rightful owners—the unfortunate Central American families who had contributed their precious heirlooms to speed the political revolution in which General Martez so fatally failed, doubtless involving them in his ruin—should present and make good to him their just demands for a restoration of the property."

"Still," said the detective, "the incorruptible integrity of the old gentleman in regarding himself as merely the responsible custodian of such a treasure, so immense in value, so vague as to its real ownership, more than condones the Quixotism of this scheme of his for its safe-keeping."

Inez adored her grandfather, and she cast a grateful look at the detective for these kindly words.

It was near sunrise, and they were rapidly approaching the Seamew at her quiet anchorage.

"How beautiful she looks—just like 'a thing of life,' and yet so peaceful and secure!" exclaimed the young girl. "Ah, surely no misfortune can have come to any of her inmates! And yet it seems odd that neither grandpapa nor one of his men is on the lookout for our coming."

That Ensco was of a like mind was quite evident, for he had suddenly grown thoughtful and grave.

"Ease her off, Mingo!" was his order as they were laying alongside. "There!" and down came the Scud's sail with a run. "Remain where you are, Miss Delorme."

But, nautically expert as she was, Inez had lightly followed him and the negro up over the yacht's side a moment later.

It was only to encounter them, reeling back out of the cabin entrance, with looks of horror in their faces.

"Stop, Miss Delorme, you must not go in there!" cried Ensco, in a strangely changed, hoarse voice, and he made a spring to intercept her. "It is not fit—something has happened. Really—"

But she had evaded him, and was already at the open cabin door.

Then her shriek rung abroad, and, with wide-staring eyes fixed upon a ghastly scene, she would have fallen but for the detective's supporting arm.

"Something" had, indeed, happened.

The cabin interior was literally wrecked, and evidently the recent scene of a murderous struggle.

The insensible form of Captain Marston lay behind the overturned chart-table, the venerable face streaked with blood, the bald head crushed in by repeated blows, doubtless from a heavy chair, whose shivered fragments were strewn over the body.

Just inside the door lay the captain's faithful steward, Mala, an old Sandwich Islander, his head and face beaten to a jelly.

The dead body of Hammond, the yacht's second officer, a life-long servitor and friend of the owner, was outside near the foot of the short companionway, mercilessly stabbed, a frown on the face, a broken capstan bar in the knotted hands.

Blood and confusion everywhere, doubtless the relics of a murderous midnight strife, in which crime had triumphed.

And of robbery as well!

The small iron safe, directly behind where the old captain lay, open, its massive door, with the combination lock, blown from its hinges—the interior empty, the treasure-chest gone!

A single glance had betrayed these ghastly particulars.

Then, followed by Mingo, the detective had lost not a moment in bearing the swooning Inez back to the open air of the deck.

This move had hardly been effected before there was a cheery hail from the yacht's boat that was approaching from the shore.

In it were John Dago, the Seamew's chief officer, with two seamen at the oars, all of them old and trusted hands.

Wholly unsuspecting of the tragic event, as was evident at a glance, they made the boat fast and lightly leaped over the side, when the fainting girl and the appalled looks of the two men were their first hint of what was in store for them.

In a moment Dago had taken in the awful scene, and joined the group on deck, leaving his companions, half-paralyzed with horror, below.

"Merciful Heaven!" he gasped, as soon as he could find speech, "I see it all now. This comes of hiring those suspicious-looking new hands, that I was so dead against, though Captain Marston wouldn't listen to a delay that better ones might be looked up. They're at the bottom of this work—I'd swear to it!—especially the slim chap as shipped for bo'sen's mate."

The detective caught at the words.

"What was *he* like?" was his swift demand.

"Young, supple an' handsome, black eyes, black mustache, curling black hair, gentlemanly an' soft-spoken, too, barrin' a treacherous, skulking look, and with a little red birth-mark, something like an arrer, on his left cheek, that he seemed precious anxious to hide."

Inez had reopened her horrified eyes, and overheard the characteristic description.

"Juan Martez—the elder of the accursed twins!" she shrieked, springing out of the detective's support, and wildly clinching her hands. "Oh, misery, misery! Vasco's boast was not an idle one!"

Here one of the sailors came running up the companionway, calling out that Captain Marston was still alive and partly conscious.

Ensco was the first to re-enter the cabin, having resolutely intercepted Inez's frantic rush to precede him.

As he strode over to where the old captain was supported by the sailor who had remained there, something glittering caught his attention on the floor.

It was a sapphire ring, set round with brilliants, which he succeeded in securing without being perceived.

The terribly wounded gentleman, who was obviously near his last extremity, made a sign of recognition, and then by an effort he laid his hand tenderly upon the head of the young girl, who had sunk, voiceless in her anguish, in a kneeling attitude at his side.

"Ensco," he gasped, "she is under your protection now. You—you will accept the trust?"

"With my life!" was the stern response.

"The treasure gone—the accursed twins and their sorceress-dam victorious at last—but you will keep up the quest, the defense, the revenge, Ensco—you will not falter?"

"Not while life remains to me!" and the detective solemnly raised his hand. "It is an oath—an oath in heaven!"

"Ha! Good, excellent! Oh, Ensco!" the dying man suddenly raised himself, throwing his limp arms around the detective's neck. "Quick, ere it be too late! There is a secret—the fate of my daughter, Nessie's mother, and of George Delorme, her husband—"

"Speak, grandpapa, speak at last!" cried Inez, wildly. "My parents—are they alive or dead?"

The glazing eyes glared at her.

"Alive, perhaps," came in a husky whisper, "but, better dead, far better!"

"Say not so! Tell me where they are! Oh, grandpapa, as you stand in this extremity, speak!"

But further speech was impossible.

There was gush of blood from the old man's lips, an inarticulate cry, that sounded like "Land ho! land at last!" and then, as the young girl's despairing wail went forth, he was gone!

CHAPTER IV.

A FORTNIGHT LATER.

AT dusk of a fine day, a fortnight after the tragedy of the yacht Seamew, Inez Delorme stood in the drawing-room facing the river of the old Marston residence.

Her hat was on, and she was about to step out into the grounds.

Mrs. Twiggs, the old housekeeper, who had been almost a mother to the young girl, looked up a little anxiously from her sewing-chair.

"I wouldn't go just yet, dear," said she. "You haven't yet received Mr. Ensco's signal."

"No, aunt," it was thus that Inez mostly addressed the housekeeper, "but look!" and she peered out over the lawn and darkening water; "yonder is the twinkle of the Seamew's lantern, rocking at the anchorage just off Astoria."

"But the detective was not to put off for this interview until quite dark, and the twilight is not gone."

Inez sighed.

The wearing shock of her grandfather's tragic death—as yet unavenged, or even brought home to the perpetrators—still showed its subduing traces in her soft beauty, though she seemed lovelier than ever.

"What of that? It is so stupid, remaining shut up here so incessantly, as in a besieged cabin in the Indian country."

"There are enemies, more cunning and pitiless than red savages, for you to be guarded against, dearie," urged the old lady, impressively.

"But we have no longer with us the treasure-chest, aunt, which all these bolts and bars and cast-iron regulations were intended to defend."

Then her lip trembled at the thought that the dear, good grandfather was no longer with them either—passed forever to that mysterious bourne from which no traveler returns.

Mrs. Twiggs looked up at her lovingly over her spectacles.

"You forget, my dear, that we have still in keeping a yet more priceless treasure, which these devil's whelps, Juan and Vasco, are fully as determined to carry off as was their terrible mother in the case of the jewel-chest."

A flash of hatred and fear crossed the fair young brow, and then the discontent reappeared in the lovely face.

"Oh, yes; you mean me, of course."

"Of course, dearie!" And Mrs. Twiggs dropped her knitting to take one of the soft, listlessly-hanging little hands, which she patted and smoothed between her dry old palms. "Whom else but my darling?"

"Treasure, indeed!" Inez's tone was passionately in earnest. "I wish—I wish—"

"Well, and what does my darling wish?"

"Oh! next to bringing Juan and Vasco to the scaffold, aunt, I wish that I were ugly and poor, instead of handsome and rich, or else—just dead!"

"Tut, tut, tut! Wild words, these, for my petted Inez to speak!"

"But I'm not petted—save by you now, aunt." And there was a kindly answer to the pressure of the fondling palms. "Petted, indeed! to be up here, day in and day out, as in a jail, with only an occasional peek out at the door or window for a mouthful of fresh air!"

"But it cannot be for long, dearie. Remember, it is by Mr. Ensco's earnest advice."

"As if I should forget it!"

"The criminal young men once captured, and their crimes brought home to them, as the Harbor Detective is now striving for, and my darling will once more have the world of love and admiration at her pretty feet."

"Ah, no, aunt!" despondently. "I shall never love or be loved. Of that I am quite positive."

Mrs. Twiggs, having forgotten the unconscious hypocrisies of maidenhood, always took Inez seriously.

"Not love or be loved!" she repeated. "Bless me, my child! what else are you made for?"

"I don't know; to be dogged, and watched, and made miserable, I suppose."

"Nonsense, sheer nonsense! Why, Mr. Ensco was saying to me, on the occasion of his last secret visit here—But, bless me! what ails you, my dear?"

Inez had snatched away her hand but the old lady's imperfect eyesight fortunately failed to mark the telltale color—invariably invoked of late at the mere mention of the handsome detective's name in anything like an emotional connection—that had suddenly overspread the pure pallor of the fair young face.

"Nothing," was the short reply. "Well, well, Aunt Twiggs; Mr. Ensco was saying to you—?"

"That you must still keep close, my dear; but that, the danger once passed, you might safely enter but to conquer upon the world of wealth and fashion and admiration that is doubtless impatient to applaud your debut."

"Oh!" a little disappointedly.

"Yes; and that your peerless beauty and rare accomplishments could not fail to win your choice from among the richest, highest-placed and most distinguished in all the land for a husband."

"Indeed!"

"Yes; and I couldn't exactly understand, for he seemed so downhearted and cheerless-like while he was predicting so many pretty and brilliant things for you."

"You are sure he seemed that way?" eagerly.

"To be sure I am, dearie; and, as he turned away, he muttered something about a poor and obscure man having no chance, no matter how

much he might love and do for you, as a simple matter of course. 'Oh, that stands to reason, Mr. Ensco!' says I. 'Just as our Nessie is a natural-born princess among girls, just so sure could she never think of any wooer who might be only poor, but honest, and otherwise unworthy. And for that matter,' says I—"

Inez, or "Nessie," cut her short by throwing her arms around the old neck, and bursting into a laugh that was like chime of joy-bells—her sweet, natural laugh that had hardly been heard since the sunrise tragedy on board the Seamew.

"Oh, you dear, darling old goose!" she cried; "you know all about it, of course, don't you? You are just as deep, and penetrative, and far-seeing as the stupid men themselves, aren't you?"

"I really don't exactly understand, my dear."

But Nessie was once more at the window.

"The signal!" she exclaimed. "There it is—four swings of a red lantern, just as the detective agreed!"

"Wait! no haste! Don't forget his warning against a false signal, or some other cunning trick," said Mrs. Twiggs, who could see better at a distance than nearer at hand. "Hal! Caution's the word, Nessie."

"Nonsense, aunt! Don't you mark the flashes?"

"Yes; directly under the lawn's end there, while Ensco's were to come from midstream, while passing from the Seamew to the landing. Stop, Nessie, stop! Don't dare to forget the precautions! Some trick, some treachery—"

But, Inez had already darted into the hall, after vouchsafing a little reassuring kiss.

She could be heard giving hurried orders to the servant, who was unbarring the front door, for the fort-like safeguards of the old mansion, instituted by the late eccentric proprietor, had been sedulously kept up, at the detective's suggestion.

Then, before Mrs. Twiggs could run after her, she had disappeared.

The Marston residence was a somewhat neglected mansion of old-time stateliness, in the midst of extensive grounds, a little north of East Eighty-sixth street, on the river-bank—with a public boating and bathing float below, near the foot of that growing thoroughfare, and the grounds of the House of the Good Shepherd adjoining on the north—which is familiar to residents and rambles in that section of Yorkville by its incongruous but agreeable rusticity in the midst of the prosaic brick-and-mortar improvements, finished, finishing, and just beginning, on every hand except that of the broad river front, with its superb view of Hell Gate, the intermediate island-ends, and the opposite Long Island shore, though another pleasant break in the city river-line is supplied by the East River Park, adjoining Eighty-sixth street on the south.

Inez merely nodded to the old coachman, who was sturdily patrolling the grounds, bludgeon in hand, and then sped on through the dusk for the private boat-landing just below the lawn-embankment.

The red lantern had repeated the signal, and then remained stationary.

She had no sooner descended the bank than, with a swiftly-interrupted scream of terror, she found herself a captive in the combined grasp of the dread twins, Juan and Vasco Martez.

CHAPTER V.

THE INFERNAL TWINS' WORK.

"SILENCE!" exclaimed Vasco, who had the firmest hold of the young girl, while Juan was assisting in gagging and controlling her; "silence, or we shall be forced to kill you! Submit, and there is nothing but happiness in store for you."

"He speaks truly, Cousin Nessie," said Juan. "This abduction has become a family necessity—no more no less. No violence or indignity is dreamed of."

From the hands of the latter especially—stained with her grandfather's murder, as she had not the shadow of a doubt—the young girl shrunk in a sort of frenzy, but they were both sinewy and determined beyond her utmost resistance.

They spoke in low tones, and were dragging her toward the small landing, at which their row-boat, containing the false light that had deluded her, was in waiting.

Inez succeeded in uttering yet another half-scream.

Then a soft and painless but effective gag was secured over her lips, and she was hurried into the stern of the boat, with one of her immediate captors on either side of her.

"Give way!" growled Juan. "Caramba! that last cry was not unheard."

The long, spoon-shaped skulls of four ruffianly oarsmen bit the shimmering gloom of the water at the same instant, and the keen, narrow boat shot out and away like an arrow let fly.

Juan's anxiety was not misplaced. Nessie's last cry had not passed unheard.

Old John, the coachman on patrol duty, was already on the retreating bank, calling out her name and sounding a general alarm in stentorian tones.

"No ciudadano!" commented Vasco, placidly. "Let him roar!"

They rowed with the tide, which was swirling up in the direction of Hell Gate with fierce velocity.

But at that instant the true signal, which Nessie's impetuosity had not been content to make sure of—four swayings of a red lantern from a boat midway between the Seamew's distant anchorage and the homestead grounds—flashed up through the deepening dusk.

The captive made a movement both of hope and despair, but the young men only laughed.

"Carajo! little good will it do the Harbor Detective now," said Juan, lighting a cigarette.

"No, indeed; our boat may safely defy pursuit," observed Vasco, "even if they should see us and suspect our mission."

"You may well say so. What is the yacht's small boat, with its single rower, even if it be the detective's black giant, compared with this barbed clipper of ours?"

"Hurrah for the red lantern! Aha, that was a lucky trick by which we duplicated the signal agreed on!"

"Rather say forestalled, Vasco. And how would you have managed but for my overhearing the parting words between our fair cousin and her bold detective night before last at the edge of the terrace?"

"True; but if you had knifed him then and there between the shoulder-blades, how much better yet!"

Juan gave an involuntary shudder, which, perceiving the girl's eyes bent upon him, he pretended to be a mimic one.

"Por Dios!" he muttered, half-under his breath; "wait till you've dipped your own hands in the red before recommending the dye-pot so freely for others."

"Don't be angry, Juan; it was only my joke."

"Yes, joke! You can afford it, with Cousin Nessie there for your prospective bride, and your share of mother's recovered jewel-chest to lavish upon the pair of you at will. But as for me, unjustly accused of my granduncle's murder, and with all the minions of the law on my track, to say nothing of this water sleuth-hound, Rowlock Ensco—well, the case is not so charming!"

Juan growled out these discontented words in a mixture of Spanish and English—in which, by the way, most of the colloquy was being carried on, Inez being fortunately familiar therewith, through her thorough knowledge of both.

"Don't be downcast, I say, *amigo*," urged Vasco, cheerfully. "They have not caught you yet. You haven't thought of how you lost your sapphire ring yet, I suppose?"

Juan was craning his neck to starboard while peering for the detective's red lantern which had ceased to sway to and fro, and was now a mere lurid, slightly moving speck out in the darkness.

"No, no!" he replied, absently.

"*Madre de Dios!*" and Vasco's voice fell almost to a whisper; "if it should have been picked up in the cabin of the Seamew after—"

Juan straightened himself up in a sort of terrified frenzy.

"Cease your infernal croakings, or we'll quarrel!" he hoarsely interrupted, with a torrent of Mexican maledictions. "Found there? Impossible—preposterous—false!"

"Compose yourself, Juan."

"What! must you forever be suggesting hangman's knots and gibbets?"

"Peste! Nothing of the sort."

"And that, with Ensco, the sleuth-hound of the harbor waves once more on our track? Look out for yourself!"

Vasco obeyed.

"You are mistaken," said he, after a moment's scrutiny. "I cannot see that yonder boat-light alters its position a hair's-breadth."

"Precisely, for the excellent reason that it is heading dead toward us, and at no tortoise jog, either."

Vasco remained silent, while Inez had already marked the truth of this with a joyful heart-leap.

Availing herself of the negligence into which her guards had lapsed, she now sprung forward unexpectedly, seized the red lantern that was poised not far away, and hurled it abroad with all her strength.

It described a bright, crimson arc in the darkness before disappearing.

Juan shouted an imprecation, thrust her back furiously, and half-drew his stiletto.

But Vasco, who had repined the young girl's arms from behind, drew her back, and, laughing gayly, snatched a kiss.

The men at the oars, also, took the liberty of bursting into a coarse guffaw.

"What, Juan," cried Vasco, "are you so apprehensive? Caramba!"

And, releasing Inez, he relieved her of the gag.

But her first use of her liberty was not to scream afresh, as might have been expected.

It was to fetch him such a box on the ear as made his senses swim.

She was red with anger.

"Coward! ruffianly brute!" she hissed, in better Spanish than his own, "you would dare to kiss me? Had I but a weapon! Even that

murder-stained villain"—she indicated Juan—"had not offered me such an indignity!"

And she sunk back scornfully in her seat.

Juan, who had begun to smile maliciously at his brother's rebuff, grew black, though Vasco's good-nature was undisturbed.

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed the latter. "*Carajo!* but there's pith in that shapely arm of thine, cousin mine. God forbid that its fury, though, should outlast our nuptials!"

Inez maintained a disdainful silence.

"It may be well for *you* to laugh!" snarled Juan. "But none the less has the girl's action signaled her situation to the enemy. I give you fair warning, if she yells out, my dagger shall stop her throat, cousin or no cousin, bride or no bride!"

And he altered the boat's course a point or two, so as to hug yet closer the dangerous swirl of the Gate while making for the west current between Ward's Island and the city shores.

Inez smiled at the superfluity of the warning.

Little need of a signal by scream or otherwise, since it was evident that the first had been so well understood.

Even at that instant a small rocket shot up from the pursuing craft.

Then, for all of her single rower, the steadfast red light in her prow, which was pretty much all that could be distinctly seen of her, seemed to be slowly enlarging.

CHAPTER VI.

THE OVER HELL GATE RACE.

JUAN was as quick to mark the change as Inez. With one of his favorite imprecations he brought a night-glass to bear on the pursuer.

"She has actually hoisted a sail!" he growled, after an ominous pause. "That explains it. *Diablo!* who'd have suspected it in such a cockle-shell?"

He quietly put up the glass, and began to examine his revolver, for he could be cool and deadly enough on occasion.

Vasco followed his example, his white, even teeth glistening between his smiling lips in the light of the remaining lantern, an ordinary uncolored one.

In fact, sharply contrasting the sullen moodiness of the elder twin, the villainy of this young man was invariably tempered by a dare-devil gayety that would not have been without its charm in one of a less notorious and incorrigible viciousness.

"I suppose I have it bred in the bone," said he, lightly, "for my progenitors were no less sailors than soldiers. At all events, be it for life or for death, let me grapple with fate on the running wave!"

And he broke into a bright *barcarolo* in a rich tenor voice.

Juan nodded approvingly.

"I, too!" said he, throwing off his jacket, and baring his sinewy arm to the elbow, while his strong hand opened and shut caressingly on his glistening revolver's stock. "The treacherous sea-water for a fighting ground, and everything equal! I ask for nothing better."

But here there were unmistakable murmurs from the "crew," which had before this manifested some discontent; for it was now the critical tidal moment at the Gate, causing the boat to pitch about dangerously in the boiling waters; while, to make matters worse, she had just undergone a huge "wash" from one of the Astoria ferry-boats, which, with its tall rows of gleaming cabin lights had swept by within near hail on its way to the Ninety-second street dock.

"Be the powers, thin, it isn't meself as agrees wid aither av ye!" dissented the stroke-oar, a beetle-browed, bull-necked professional river-thief of immense proportions.

"Oho!" sneered Juan, contemptuously, with a significant flick of his revolver; "and who asked *your* opinion, Mike?"

"Faix, but it's meself—"

"You'll keep it to yourself till asked for, or the worse for you!" This with a yet more menacing air.

The ruffian was temporarily cowed, but this did not prevent the oarsman next in line, who was quite as dangerous-looking, from taking up the cue.

"Well, for my part," he drawled out, "I'd much sooner be rifling an Indian's lockers, or even robbing a new wharf-cargo, watchman or no watchman, at the moment, than be in this snap, if it's that water-devil, Rowlock Ensko, in yonder ghost-boat that's after us. And you two young gentlemen might as well know it first as last!"

Juan had vainly essayed to quiet him with a stern gesture, and then a quietly murderous look had settled upon his dark face.

Vasco touched his arm as if to enjoin him to patience.

Then his own voice was no longer laughing, but fairly trumpet-like he called out to the bow-oar:

"Jago! be ready to put a bullet into Red Pete's neck at the first sign from me. As for you, Big Mike, bear in mind that you're doubly covered when disposed to fire off that flannel-mouth of yours again. You ought to know us!"

The growing mutiny was thus summarily squelched, though Juan thought it necessary to make a little quiet speech in thieves' latin, with still further effect upon the two grumblers, while Vasco, laughing afresh, gave another snatch of song, that seemed to complete the restoration of harmony, so far as it could be said to exist among such diverse ruffianly elements.

In the mean time the first of the dreaded tide-pots of the Gate had been crossed, with two more to come, so closely were they hugging in to the Ward's Island rocks, perhaps in the hope of luring their small pursuer to her destruction, while the red light was slowly and surely gaining in the chase.

But, in spite of this apparently desperate look of affairs, Vasco threw himself in a careless attitude at the fair captive's side, and endeavored to engage her in a bantering chat.

"Confess now, cousin, how you are longing to be rescued by that devil of a detective back yonder," he laughed, pitching his voice in a soft, musical key, that recalled his comparatively innocent boyhood to her. "Confess it, though little good it may do you, my dear. Ah! *Chiquita mio*, our wharf-rat refuge is not far away. Your detective cannot overhaul us, or he will be killed in the attempt. So, come now, and chat with me merrily, as you used to do when we twins were but seventeen and you not ten. Do you remember the banana-bird song of mine that you used to like?"

And he began to trill it again, a wild and weird little thing, full of tropical conceits and summer sea melody, like an echo of the past.

Notwithstanding her anxieties and resentments, Nessie could not help viewing the young desperado as a sort of enigma.

In the old days, when the familiarity of childhood had swiftly arisen between her and these strange cousins of hers—the handsome but mischievous and devil may-care boy-twins from the Spanish Main, Vasco had always been her favorite, he was so jovial, so ready-witted, so brave and so good-naturedly selfish, in contrast with the brooding somberness of Juan, that grave *alter ego* of his, in body as in disposition, save for that tiny red arrow of the sinister cheek.

There was nothing he would not do *la chiquita sobrina Inez* (the little cousin Inez,) so he called her, and she even remembered some girlish tears over his incorrigibility at the time of his flight with Juan before the righteous wrath of her grandfather.

And now to what extremities of wickedness had he descended!

She shuddered as she saw him stretched so carelessly there at her feet, singing like a bird, so handsome, so graceful in his half-Mexican costume, and doubtless as lost and as blood-stained as the sterner Juan himself, though perhaps not with the actual murder of her grandfather and his two followers.

She had read of the wild deeds of the Buccaneers, the Marooners, and their Corsair successors of the tropic seas, and the young men strongly suggested such a criminal yet romantic ancestry to her at the present moment in a way that she did not care to dwell on—perhaps for the reason that there was more or less fascination in the idea.

"I wish you wouldn't sing, sir!" said she at last. "It isn't—becoming."

Vasco stopped instantly.

"Of old you did not dislike my singing," he softly protested.

"Of old, you were not what you are," she retorted.

A look that was not good to see flashed over his face.

"*Bueno!* but might you not overlook that if—the detective had not come into your life?"

A disdainful movement was the only answer.

He seized her hand.

"Inez, you are to be mine, my bride forever!" he exclaimed, with sudden fierceness. "Strive not against the inevitable! I have sworn it. It is also my mother's will—Ah! does her mere name make you tremble, then?—it is likewise the will of Fate. Child!"

Crimson with indignation, she was struggling ineffectually to release her hand.

"It must, it shall be so!" he continued, fiercely. "Inez, you are mine! Essay not to oppose the inevitable. Family considerations, the disposition of the jewel-treasure, my own and my brother's security, a hundred complications imperatively demand it. You cannot, you shall not escape! All this apart from my love, my passion for you, *chiquita querida!* It has kindled and mounted throughout the lonely years until it has become a fiery madness in my soul. Inez—Nessie! peerless, beautiful, adored! in accepting, even perforce, this heart, this hand—"

"Away!" she had succeeded at last in flinging him back; her voice was hoarse with terror and disgust; "the one is black with iniquity, the other stained with blood—the blood of my grandfather, to whose murder, wretch, you were at least accessory!"

Vasco's laugh was his retort, but with no gayety now—a terrible laugh!

His face had become as a fiend's—a face sug-

gesting his mother's, and consequently the woman-faced emblem of the emblem in tattoo.

Inez was almost beside herself with nameless apprehensions.

But they were passing through the second tide-swirl of Hell Gate, and at that instant, with a sharp jar, the boat grated on a sunken rock.

Vasco sprang to the neglected tiller, while Juan was on his feet like a flash.

"Back water!" he roared. "Ease her off two points! Curse your mooning folly, Vasco! that was your fault. Ease her off, I say!"

"No use, senors!" growled Jago, shipping his sculls, and then twisting in his seat. "Our bow's stove in, and the whole river's coming in on us."

CHAPTER VII.

THE ROCK STEP TRAGEDY.

"KEEP Mike and Pete to work, at the pistol's point!" shouted Juan.

Then he had fairly scrambled over their shoulders to the bow, jacket in hand, where Jago was already essaying to plug up the rent.

But it was past remedy, for the foot-boards were awash.

Nessie's nerve had unaccountably returned to her, and, with a fortunate spring, she had succeeded in reaching the smooth surface of a rock that projected out of the boiling waters but a few feet away, without even wetting her feet.

The green shore of Ward's Island point was about ten yards distant.

In an instant Vasco was at the young girl's side, leaving the boat with its remaining inmates to settle as it might.

"All's up!" shouted Juan. "Remember the rendezvous at Bowery Bay!"

Then he was dimly seen to leap over the disappearing gunwale, and strike out for the island, in which he was followed by his three companions.

In the mean time, the red lantern of the passing small-boat was bright and distinct, not fifty yards away, and she, obedient to her sail, dancing lightly over the perilous eddies as if possessing a charmed life.

"Inez—Miss Delorme!" it was Rowlock's voice, clear but anxious, trumpeting out of the gloom; "where are you?"

"*Here, HERE!*" she screamed, in an agony of delight. "Here upon a small rock! Haste, oh, haste!"

But, Vasco had grasped her wrist, and his low, fearless laugh sounded hideously in her ears.

"I am here, too; why don't you tell him *that?*" he hissed. "Here, too, *chiquita querida*, and, thanks to Vengeance, with my revolvers dry!"

But her fears were now for another than herself.

"Rowlock, be careful!" she shrieked, as the boat approached. "I am not alone. Vasco is here. He is armed. Look out!"

Vasco had clutched her with a grip of iron. His left hand was over her lips, in his right glistened his revolver ready for instant use on the now distinctly-outlined figure in the bow of the little shallop, just rounding to at the rock's edge, and quivering like a live thing in the swift hesitance of her shifted sail.

A fierce laugh burst from the young Honduran's lips.

"Dog of a detective!" he cried; "think you to sleuth us forever with your cursed cunning, your—"

Piff! A light puff of smoke from the dark figure in the bow, a report, and then Vasco's pistol went off harmlessly in the air as it was dashed from his hand by an unerring bullet striking it in the butt.

"All's over for the present," hissed Vasco, and the next instant he had disappeared headlong in the seething flood.

"Oh, Rowlock, I am so glad—so glad!" and, without thinking of what she was doing, Inez, sobbing hysterically, threw herself in the detective's arms, as he sprang to the rock at her side, after sheering off the boat by a parting kick of his vigorous heel.

A thrill of ecstasy pervaded Rowlock's frame, but he was far too generous to take even an instant's advantage of the situation to express the emotion that almost controlled him.

He turned from the sobbing girl, after composing her with a soothing gesture.

"Quick, Mingo!" he cried. "Little Starlight will hold the boat. *Overboard* after them, and remember, Juan is our chief game!"

The negro plunged over the taffrail, and was off in the wake of the three men who had first taken to the water, Vasco having somehow mysteriously disappeared after his initial plunge.

The detective helped Inez on board the little pinna.

"There! you are almost yourself again," he said, with his reassuring gentleness.

"Oh, yes, sir!" she replied, though still trembling. "That is, I think so." And she sunk into a cushioned seat at the stern.

"Look!" he exclaimed. "If any man in the world can make a swimming capture, it is Mingo. Stand ready with a grapple, Starlight! So!" And the boat began to creep inshore.

The person thus oddly addressed was a queer little wizen-faced urchin, in yachting costume, who obeyed orders with a directness and taciturnity that rivaled Mingo himself.

By the starry shimmer that was now upon the waters, the latter could be seen making prodigious progress through the swirling tide, with a formidable jack-knife between his teeth, in pursuit of the three heads that were making for the island shore.

"I—I think they might as well have been let go," stammered Inez, "at least for the present."

"I don't," responded the detective. "Even one of the minor scoundrels, as a witness against the others, might be invaluable to us."

"Ah! but look. Oh, dear, how dreadful!"

The two foremost fugitives had clambered ashore, and disappeared, while the negro had overtaken the hindmost, with whom he was engaged in a terrific struggle.

Suddenly both men vanished beneath the surface.

"Quick, Starlight!" called out Ensco, in a low voice. "There, easy now. No fear of Mingo, in such a tussle."

He was right. At that moment a huge, motionless form, motionless save for the unquiet action of the waves, reappeared on the surface.

It was that of Big Mike, a stiletto still clutched in one listless hand, the knife of the faithful negro buried hilt-deep in the lifeless breast!

"Bad, bad," muttered Ensco. "Better to have had him alive, but it couldn't be helped!"

Here the boat careened a little under a giant grasp on the gunwale, and then the victorious Mingo drew himself in from the water.

"Ugh!" he grunted, shaking himself amidships. "No use, Marse Rowlock."

And, reaching out to recover his knife, he resumed his duties in the management of the boat as if nothing unusual had interrupted them.

Inez shuddered, and she drew her light mantle more closely about her.

"What now?" she asked, noticing that they were heading straight back through the Gate.

"Around the point," was the detective's laconic answer, as he grasped the tiller. "There's a chance, though only a slight one, of our intercepting the others in their attempt to reach their rendezvous at Bowery Bay."

"Ha! you know of that rendezvous, then?"

"I do."

"But might not the officers of some of the institutions on the island there assist in their capture, were you to give the alarm?"

The detective shook his head.

"Scant time for that. There's a boat or two that the scoundrels can have availed themselves of ere this."

This was made apparent as soon as the point had been rounded, for a small boat with two occupants was seen making its way rapidly across the outer reach toward the Long Island shore, with the strong tide in its favor, while there was now nothing but a strong head-wind for the pursuer.

"No good!" growled Ensco. "They'll make the passage in less than ten minutes, and we are not strong enough to follow them into the gang's chief fastness to-night."

And he reluctantly altered the shallop's course.

"What gang is it?" asked Inez.

"The powerful gang of river-bandits who seem to render unquestioning obedience to those scoundrelly brothers."

"Ah! but Vasco must have been left behind, no less than the dead man. There are only two in yonder boat."

"True; let us hope that he also met his doom in the depths."

"Oh, no! Oh, no!"

"But, why not hope it? There would then be but Juan, the master-murderer, left."

"Yes, yes; to hope it—to desire it as just and well! But then, Vasco was always so brave, so venturesome, so desperate, especially on the water, that I cannot think—"

She shrunk down in her seat with a scream.

"Vasco is here!" suddenly burst out a defiant voice, followed by a blood-curdling laugh. "Here to claim his bride, or to dedicate her to his vengeance!"

He had suddenly risen from the water and scrambled over the stern, poniard in hand, like a veritable sprite of the waves.

CHAPTER VIII.

A LEAP FOR VENGEANCE.

ROWLOCK recoiled from the tiller just in time to avoid a vicious lunge of the young bravo's knife over Nessie's shrinking head.

But, as he did so, his revolver leaped into view, and spoke with as cunning precision as on the previous occasion, the bullet snapping the uplifted poniard's blade short off at the hilt.

"Quick, Mingo!" shouted the detective, springing straight at the intruder's throat. "But remember, alive—at all hazards!"

But he was intercepted by the tiller striking him heavily in the breast, in its release, and he once more went reeling back, while Mingo, agile though he was, was as yet but midway to the stern sheets.

Vasco broke into a terrible laugh.

"Mine in death, if not mine in life!" he yelled, as he caught the shrinking Inez in his grasp, and jumped with her into the waves.

In an instant they had disappeared beneath the surface.

A cry of terror (terror for her,) no less than of fury, had burst from the Harbor Detective's lips, and he was on the taffrail, with his hands joined over his head, his body curved for the pursuing plunge; but a lithe, slight figure—the figure of the little lad Starlight—flitted past and before him like a flash.

"I'm best at water-rattin', Rowlock!" sung out the lad. "Whatcher about?"

And his diving form had cut down through the water like a knife.

Ensco was about to follow when Mingo's massive grasp closed on his shoulder.

He turned upon him in a sort of frenzy, but the ebony face of the African was expressive of nothing but contentment.

"Golly, Marse Rowlock! One's enough. Look; all serene!"

He pointed to where Inez had just re-appeared, lightly buoyed by the partial inflation of her garments, and gasping for breath, but obviously more frightened than hurt.

They had her, shivering, on board without delay, soon to be warmly wrapped up in some old pea-jackets, which the negro produced from a convenient locker.

Then little Starlight also made his re-appearance, scrambling forward, like a half-drowned but uncommonly lively rat, without vouchsafing a syllable of explanation.

The boat was again speedily under management; the spanker filled away, and the altered course was once more resumed, this time without interruption.

Ensco had anxiously searched the surface of the water with his eagle glance, but without detecting the faintest sign of Vasco's showing up again.

He looked tenderly down at the rescued girl. Exhausted by the repeated nervous shocks she had undergone, and warmly bundled up against the night air, the grateful reaction had come at last.

She had sunk into the brief unconscioness of a sweet sleep.

The long, bent, silken lashes of the closed eyes rested upon the fair cheeks, the pallor of the beautiful, upturned face was suggestive of deep peace in the still starshine, her soft breathing came and went equably through the slightly parted coral lips, all the more tempting for a pathetic air of weariness, and the uncouth covering just undulated to the slumberous rise and fall of her gentle breast.

The detective gave an inward sigh. How he had come to adore her!

What would he not have given to imprint but one kiss, that would not be unwelcome, on those perfect lips! And his bosom thrilled anew as he thought of how she had nestled in his arms, though but for an unconscious instant of alarm, back there on the wave-washed river-rock.

He removed his lingering eyes only with an effort from their flashing gaze.

"Here!"

And, in obedience to an accompanying sign, the boy Starlight was aft at his side.

"How did you manage?"

"He was a-treadin' water jest under the surface with her sort o' hitched close, boss," he explained, "when I bu'sted him full in the bread-basket. Then he sort o' sheered off, and she popped up'ards like a bladder-fish."

"Have you any notion what could have become of him? Could he have been drowned?"

"Not more'n a Tom cod. That duck was as much at hum under water, boss, as a sculpin or a bull-frog."

"That will do."

The boy rejoined the negro forward.

Some time later Inez opened her eyes, and then started up.

"Where are we?" she exclaimed, after recollecting her bewildered senses. "Ah!" and she took a hurried survey of her surroundings; "you are not taking me home."

"No, but to the yacht, Miss Delorme," replied the detective, reassuringly. "That is best for the present, because the nearest at hand. Be composed, I beseech you!"

"I am no longer discomposed now, thank you."

"That is well. In the mean time, Starlight shall convey to Mrs. Twiggs the tidings of your safety. And, if I mistake not, there are portions of your wardrobe remaining in the after cabin of the Seamew."

"That is true. Thank you again, Mr. Ensco; you are very thoughtful. Doubtless it is for the best. Still!" She shuddered involuntarily.

He understood.

"Ah! you have not been on board since—the tragedy. I had almost forgotten. Perhaps I should land you directly at Astoria?"

"No," with sudden resolution; "I shall have to master the repugnance some time. Why not now? Besides, the dry garments are indispensable."

Her courage was noteworthy, especially in view of what she had so recently undergone.

Nevertheless, it was with difficulty that she suppressed another shudder when she gained the

yacht's deck, a few minutes later, and murmured an acknowledgment of Chief Officer John Dago's respectful greeting.

With one other—Tom Goff, the boatswain, a capital tar—he was the only one of the Seamew's original crew that had been retained; while the detective also had of late made his home chiefly in the yacht.

A commodious state-room, luxuriously furnished, at the after end of the Seamew's saloon cabin, had been occupied by Inez on many a yachting cruise in company with her grandfather.

Now, upon emerging from this, after effecting the desired change of garments, she found the detective thoughtfully awaiting her at the saloon table, upon which some refreshments had been placed.

The young lady's face wore a pleased look, as she seated herself, and began to discuss some of the good things before her, in which, at her pressing invitation, he joined her, while she told him the story of her misadventure from beginning to end.

There was not a single reminder of the terrible tragedy of which the place had been the scene; the entire interior had been charmingly refitted.

Inez testified her appreciation of it all in many ways as she talked. She even grew cheerful, and occasionally laughed happily as she fed a tidbit to the first officer's pretty skye-terrier that was romping about the saloon.

Ensco listened in attentive silence, and then briefly narrated how he had chanced to divine her danger, and had headed so opportunely to the rescue.

"Now let us sift to-night's strange happenings to their bottom," said he, "and see what useful hints for our future behoof we can extract from them."

"Agreed," replied Inez. "But first tell me what you were examining as I approached the table. It flashed like something precious when you were slipping it out of sight."

Ensco smiled.

"I intended to exhibit it later on," said he, "But let it be now."

And he laid before her the sapphire ring he had picked up at the first discovery of the tragedy.

It was so beautiful that she uttered an exclamation as she took it in her hand.

"Be careful how you press the ring in that particular way, please!" hurriedly cautioned her companion. "There is a dangerous secret in the gem."

"Secret—dangerous? Why, what do you mean?" And at that instant the terrier familiarly scrambled into her lap, and pawed out playfully for the trinket.

Suddenly the little creature withdrew its paw with an agonized yelp, and rolled from her lap to the floor, where it fell into convulsions.

Inez was thunderstruck.

"How terrible!" her lip quivered. "Oh, it is horrible! Poor little thing!"

"By the merest accident, though. It is all up with Mr. Dago's pet, I am afraid."

The animal was indeed dead.

"The ring was doubtless Juan's," explained the detective, in answer to the young girl's anguished look of inquiry. "It's secret is a poisoned dart."

She gave a sob of mingled fright and grief, and dropped the ring with a horrified gesture.

CHAPTER IX.

ON THE SEAMEW.

ENSOCO returned to the table after causing the removal of the unfortunate animal's remains.

"Compose yourself, Miss Delorme," said he, cheerfully. "I have explained the mishap to Mr. Dago, who was not inconsolable. He seems not to have cared much for the dog, which was given him by an old messmate only a few days ago. He says you're not to feel worried an instant—otherwise he shall never forgive himself for bringing the little brute on board."

"Forgive himself? Oh, Mr. Ensco, the poor, the innocent little thing! and so playful, so affectionate, only the instant before."

In addition to her quivering lip, the tears were streaming down her cheeks.

With a gesture of dismissing the subject, he took up the ring.

How the rich azure of the stone, with its flashing girdle of brilliants, glanced and scintillated!

Inez clasped her hands, bending forward with redoubled eagerness.

Pet dogs could come and go, wag their tails and die, but such a ring, ah! how seldom is such a feast for feminine eyes.

"To think of its being so fatal, and yet so beautiful!" she murmured. "What is the secret of its deadliness?"

He pressed the thinnest part of the tiny gold band with a peculiar touch. A delicate, bluish steel point, so small as to be just perceptible, darted out from near the central setting, like the tongue of a fairy serpent, and as swiftly vanished back upon the removal of the pressure.

"You chanced upon the secret touch by the merest accident," said Ensco. "Its discovery, however, cost me a good deal of struggle."

"Look me in the face, Ensco! Oh, why will you not look up—why will you not answer me?"

He did look up, and she was startled at the change that had grown into his face—the face that she had come to love, whose image was daily deepening in her heart—it was grown so sad, so pained.

"Ask me no more," he said, in slow, measured tones. "I cannot, Inez, I must not answer you!"

She made a despairing gesture, that seemed to increase his pain, while it did not shake his resoluteness.

She could not but see this.

"Oh!" murmured Inez; "how unhappy am I! However"—her eyes flashed, her hands clinched anew—"she knows, I am sure of that. And she shall dissipate my aching suspense, terrible and implacable as she is, or she shall die!"

"Poor child! poor Inez!"

"Why do you say that? Tell me this instant, sir! How dare you pity and yet be so unkind to me?"

"I unkind?"

"Yes, in this, unkind, ungenerous! Otherwise would you satisfy me?"

"Inez, you do not, you cannot guess!"

"Indeed, I cannot; that is my misfortune."

"Rather, your privilege. My kindness is in my silence."

"Oh, you torture, you exasperate me beyond words! At least tell me this: does she know?"

"The White Sibyl?"

"Yes."

The answer came slowly, unwillingly, but it came.

"There is nothing concerning you, Inez Delorme, that the Senora Zarapatta Martez does not know."

CHAPTER XI.

THE PHANTOM STEAM-LAUNCH.

THEY were at this moment interrupted by the sudden appearance of a small, swiftly-moving steam-launch that had unexpectedly rounded the light-house point on her up-stream course, and was making directly across her bow.

Glad enough to have the current of her thoughts changed, Inez looked up in surprise.

Though proceeding rapidly, silently, there was not a glimmer of light displayed by the launch, and only a soft, creamy wake followed the almost noiseless revolutions of her propeller.

No more was there any indication of life or intelligence on board, save a single dark-robed figure, sitting like a statue of lonely meditation at the stern.

"Why, how strange, how phantom-like!" murmured Inez. "Did you mark how mysteriously it came slipping and shooting round the point, Ensco?"

"Hush! let us wait." And his voice was oddly measured and expectant.

"Wait for what? But do you mark the solemnity and the strangeness of the thing, I say? Are there phantom steam-launches, no less than phantom ships, I wonder? And that ominous figure at the stern! It looks like a woman's—Ha! Heaven protect me!"

And she was cowering suddenly at her companion's side.

The figure had turned its face toward them, in the full glare of the light-house lamp.

A woman's face, the face as of one long dead, so absolute its marble whiteness! Beautiful, too, but terrible and haunting, with its steadfast, serpent eyes, and every lineament expressive of calm, self-sufficient, baleful power.

It smiled upon them—a glassy, an inscrutable, a deadly smile—and then it was gone.

"Compose yourself, Inez," muttered the detective, and she did her best to obey. "Yes; theory crystallizes into fact, and most unexpectedly."

"No doubt of it!"

"None. It was Zarapatta Martez herself, the White Sibyl of Morona."

Inez courageously controlled one of her shuddering fits.

"Those eyes! that smile! You marked them, Ensco?"

"Why not? Ay; and knew them of old, as well."

"Oh! what can it mean?"

"Time and fate must determine."

"But she must be powerful, able, self-confident, to flit about in this way."

"An enchantress, or very like one."

"And our difficulties, our dangers, are vastly increased."

"No; rather lessened by the actual revelation of this woman's proximity. She has overreached herself—devilry always does that, sooner or later. The true deadliness of her power was in keeping us in the dark as to her proximity."

"True; I see that. But what is to be done?"

"Nothing more than we are trying to do, other than additional caution and cunning on our part. The diamond is cut and polished solely with its own dust. There is a new danger; but say no more of it now."

Inez accordingly relapsed into silence, which was not broken till they were threading the grounds of the Marston House, after leaving Mingo and Little Starlight in charge of the boat, with a parting injunction to watchfulness and caution.

It was past midnight.

After accosting and passing the coachman-patrol, who was still going his faithful rounds, they stood at a side-door of the old house of which Inez always carried a key.

Then it was Ensco himself who first resumed the discussion of the all-engrossing subject in hand.

"I've been thinking everything over," said he. "And less and less do I like the thought of your remaining here."

"Why?"

"It isn't sufficiently guarded."

"The house is almost like a fort."

"No matter. Since what has last occurred—the apparition of that woman—"

"I understand. But where could I be more safe than here, unless it might be on the Seamew?"

"Well, on the yacht, then. It is your own property now, and you are its commander."

"So is this estate mine."

"Still, I can't think you as safe here as afloat."

"I shall remain, though, comrade." And she gave her short little laugh.

He sighed.

"I know what that means," she said.

"What, then?"

"That it would be all right if you could only be always at hand as my defender—be permanently one of the household here, in fact—but that would not be right and proper, in a worldly sense."

Rowlock flushed slightly.

"You have divined aright, Inez," he admitted. "Such was the exact significance of my sigh."

"You admit it?"

"Freely."

"Then apart from the bolts, bars and armed servants constituting my environment, you do not deem me cunning or able enough to guard myself against the enemy here, without your close attendance?"

"Frankly, I do not."

She laughed again.

"I am to prove the contrary to you."

She ran up the steps and noiselessly unlocked the door.

"Follow me, comrade," said she, softly. "According to Coachman John, both Mrs. Twiggs and Sarah, my maid, have long since retired, after being assured of my safety by your considerate message. The other servants are doubtless in bed. We shall have the house to ourselves for my experiments."

He followed her into a dimly-lighted corridor, Inez carefully refastening the door.

Thence he was conducted into a large apartment, which, upon the gas being turned up, proved to be the library—a cosy, substantially-furnished room.

She pointed to the foot of a narrow private staircase in a short adjoining passage-way, and then to a communicating bedroom door.

"That was poor grandpapa's sleeping-room," she exclaimed, "and the library here was his favorite resort. The staircase leads to my own rooms directly above, for nothing would do but I should be within call. Wait now."

She disappeared up the stair.

The detective threw himself into one of the great, morocco-covered arm-chairs, and, while wondering what could be her intention, fell to observing the heavy iron bars of the windows, plainly visible between the partings of the long curtains of crimson rep.

"Inez did not exaggerate," he thought. "The old gentleman made the old house pretty secure against intruders while he was about. Still, what can't an expert, determined criminal work his way through when once thoroughly provided and alert? But I wonder what the young lady can be up to."

A light footfall caused him to turn to the stairway.

Then a sort of sudden, chilling heart-anguish possessed him.

A Mexican youth stood before him, in all the jacketed, silver-buttoned cavalier bravery for which the nationality is distinguished, sombrero in hand, a supercilious curl on the short, delicately-mustached upper lip, a look of challenging askance in the bold, impudent black eyes looking out at him from under a shock of glossy, curling black hair.

"What, señor!" exclaimed the youth; "then you didn't expect the new Mexican cousin—new to you—that the pretty Inez was to send down to you from her rooms?" And then he rattled on at greater length, though in the Spanish tongue.

Ensco had grown very pale.

"No, sir, I anticipated nothing of the sort," he replied, huskily, springing to his feet, and reaching for his hat. "Pray, give the young lady my compliments upon her newly-revealed relative, and say that I wish her joy of him."

A silvery laugh—a familiar one—broke from the young ranchero.

CHAPTER XII.

A TALENTED YOUNG LADY.

THE detective was astounded.

But he had to believe his eyes, if not his ears. For, simultaneously with the rippling merri-

ment, the wig and false mustache had been plucked away, and there was Inez Delorme's smiling and beautiful self revealed before him.

"I give in, comrade!" said Ensco, throwing up his hands. "I, who have made a business of penetrating disguises, even I was thoroughly deceived. Even the tone of the voice was a perfect counterfeit."

"Wait!"

And, with a parting laugh, the real-life actress disappeared again, but not before a flush in her cheeks had apprised him that his sarcastic indignation—in other words, the betrayal of his jealousy—had not been lost upon her.

However, as it had not been a particularly displeased blush, he was induced to take heart.

Inez might have shone on the stage as a lightning-change artist with astonishing success.

Her next appearance was as a rollicking, fair-faced, tow-headed midshipman, in which she not only characteristically blasted her top lights and shivered her timbers to her heart's content, no less than that of her single auditor, but also sung a song and danced a hornpipe with a breezy saltiness of savor that was near to deceiving him once more as to her identity.

Personations of a poor sewing-girl looking for work, an Irish emigrant girl, with the map of Ireland in her face, air and brogue, a boy crossing-sweep, done to the life, and numerous others no less successful, followed in dizzy succession, the characterizations closing with that of a nut-brown Central American peon girl of the beautiful-eyed but vacant-minded mountain variety, that, once seen, is not easily forgotten by the observant tourist.

"Well?"

The performance was at an end and the pilot's granddaughter, in her own proper and graceful character, was waiting for the verdict.

The detective could not abstain from clasping her two hands in his.

"Admirable!" was all he could say.

"You admit, then, that I might pass in a crowd, as a rather expert counterfeit?"

"You are inimitable."

"And could even cheat our arch-enemy at a push?"

"If any one could do that, assuredly you could."

Her countenance fell a little.

"Ah! those frightful eyes that looked out from that death-white face upon us to-night! I doubt if any art, any cleverness could deceive them."

"You may not be put to the test. How did you learn all these tricks of the stage?"

"By study and observation. I used to half-live in one or another of the theaters, along with poor grandpapa. Then, I think, I may have a little natural talent for it."

"Not a doubt of it. And all those costumes?"

She laughed.

"Sarah helped me along with most of them, for I have transmitted some of my enthusiasm into her cockney spirit. But the Mexican and sailor-boy make-ups, they're genuine. That is, they were actually worn by Juan and Vasco when they were boys of seventeen."

"Oh!"

"Pah! how I hate now to mention their abhorred names! It seems to me—it seems to me—"

She had lapsed into a dull, mechanical tone, and a terrified look was growing in her face.

"What is the matter?"

But he had only to follow the gaze of her startled eyes, which was riveted upon the nearest window.

A white face was pressed against the bars, close to the outer panes—a white, sinister face, that vanished as he looked.

But the glimpse was sufficient to explain Nessie's alarm.

"The key, quick!" he exclaimed.

She mechanically tossed it to him, and he was out of the room, out of the house by the side-door, in a flash.

"Don't leave me alone!"

But she was unheard.

He returned in a few minutes, however, gloomy and dispirited.

"Gone! nothing there!"

She did not seem disappointed, having scarcely expected anything better.

"What sort of face was it? I only snatched the nearest glimpse. Not her's?"

She shook her head.

"No, I think not—in fact, I am quite sure. It seemed as formless as it was bloodless, and yet—a man's, not a woman's, face, I should say."

Ensco reflected.

"In spite of all, Inez," said he, "it is as I first said."

"How?"

"You are not safe here."

"But the face was outside the bars."

"What are bars, bolts, double locks, to the genius of crime, the soul of diabolism? By the way, you go armed?"

She produced in either hand a small revolver and a delicate dagger.

"Toys!"

"Excuse me, Ensco. I am not without practice. I could use either upon occasion, and with effect."

"It is Juan's ring, you say?"

"Doubtless. I thought so from the first. Now, from what you tell me of the allusion made to its loss by the twins, I am sure of it."

"You have not told me where and how you found it."

He explained.

"Ah! as a matter of course," she commented. "You should have seen Juan's superstitious panic when Vasco asked if he might not have lost it here, in this cabin, on that fatal night."

"I can imagine it. No wonder," as if thinking aloud. "The ring may be the chief witness in bringing him to the scaffold."

"But could it be proved his property against his denial?"

"Possibly."

"How so?"

"There is an inscription. And he scrutinized the inside of the band."

"What is it?"

"A full name—Zarapatta Martez."

"That woman!" with a shudder.

"Truly. Doubtless one of her wedding gifts, and but temporarily loaned to the elder twin. A fit hand-friend for the White Witch of Morona!"

Inez had fallen into a reverie, her face expressing dissatisfaction.

"What is the matter?" he asked.

"Oh, not a great deal. But was it altogether fair?"

"Was what fair?"

"Your concealment of this discovery from me up to the present time—especially after our compact."

The detective slightly colored, but did not lose countenance.

"I may have been in fault," he admitted, gravely, "but do not condemn me unheard."

"I do not condemn you at all, only—"

"Listen, Miss Delorme."

"You may address me by my Christian name. Are we not comrades?"

He flushed with pleasure.

"Ay; and to the end, Inez. Do not imagine that I have been forgetful of that sacred, that inviolable compact."

"Well, then?"

"You remember how the public detectives pestered you the first days following the tragedy? Their curiosity, their inquisitiveness, their pertinacity? I say nothing of the reporters."

"Remember! Am I likely to forget the ordeal?"

"I should say not. Bethink yourself, then, Inez. In view of our having determined between us to keep our oath-cemented detective-quest solely to ourselves, apart from all outside participation, did not that impertinent inquisition induce you to make one or two admissions that had just as well been left unsaid?"

She colored.

"Candidly, yes; more than one or two, I am afraid."

"Well—"

"Say no more. The justice of your want of faith in me is sufficiently apparent."

"Say not want of faith! You could be discreet enough now, that you have passed through the ordeal. I only waited for you to be fully on your guard."

There was complete forgiveness in the little laugh that broke from her lips.

"What! must the pupil call the master to account?" she cried. "You did just right, I tell you!"

"Thank you!" and his clearing face was good to see.

"But now," she went on, "that there are no more concealments— But wait! am I so sure of that?"

"You can be, on my honor!"

"Well, then, what of this ring, more than it was worn by Juan, and probably stamps him as the master fiend in the horrors of that—that woeful night?"

"More than you think."

"And that is—?"

He bent nearer toward her across the table.

"That the demon-mother of the demon-twins—the Senorina Zarapatta Martez, surnamed the White Sibyl of Morona—is doubtless at this juncture not far away!"

"Ha! you mean it?"

"Yes, and yet more. That she is doubtless here, in this close vicinity; nay, that she is most likely in constant communication with her sons, guiding, counseling, instructing them, and has been from the very first of their reappearance in New York!"

Inez's lips had blanched.

There seemed to be a hideous spell in the mere whisper of this mysterious woman's name.

It was a minute or two before the young girl could ask:

"What are your grounds for this supposition?"

"To mention the chief one will be sufficiently convincing."

"Go on, pray!"

"I cannot as yet tell you of my connection with that woman's past. Its picture-writing" he indicated the arm that bore the mystic emblem in tattoo "will one day be made clear to you. But none the less do I know her of old."

"Yes, yes?"

"Avarice, together with an inordinate, almost morbid, passion for precious stones, is one of the ruling characteristics of the White Sibyl's moody, evil and incomprehensible composition."

"Yes?"

"Well, I am morally certain that she would not part with such a rare jewel as this ring, even to gratify the vanity (or murderous propensity—who shall say?) of her favorite son, for but a brief period, or a special purpose."

"Ah! I begin to understand. Yes, you must be right."

"Wait; there is yet more—the invisible links, of which this glittering bauble is the only thing tangible as yet, may stretch and lead yet further, yet more surprisingly."

"I half-grasp your meaning. But go on. To what conclusion?"

"That she herself may not only have instigated, but actually led in person, the attack that culminated in the secret, midnight assassination of Captain Grant Marston and his two subordinates on this very yacht!"

Inez maintained her composure solely by a strong effort.

"The same appalling thought was dawning in my own mind," she said. "But wait! This, I fear, is going too far."

"How?"

"I have told you what passed between Juan and Vasco while I was a prisoner in their row-boat."

"Certainly."

"Well; from Vasco's allusions, no less than Juan's manner of taking them, I feel certain that the latter must have been the principal in—in—let us call it the Mystery of the Seamew hereafter."

"Agreed as to that. But what you say does not wholly dispose of my theory."

"No?"

"Not altogether. Even in forgetting your presence, they would not be likely to speak of their mother's complicity, or leadership, as the case may be, in such a frightful connection. Besides, Juan might have been likewise present."

"True."

After still further discussing the complications of the case, Inez declared that she must no longer delay her return to her home.

"You notified Mrs. Twiggs?" said she, rising.

"Yes."

"Then you must see me safely back under her protection at once."

CHAPTER X.

THE WHITE SIBYL.

UPON getting once more into the pinnace, Inez surprised the detective, who had begun to head for the Astoria landing, by laying her hand on his arm.

"Not thither," she said, half-hesitatingly. "Straight back across-stream, if you please."

"But the ferry is still running."

"I know it; but I prefer this means."

"Glad you do—with all my heart. Only," as the boat's head was turned, "I should have thought that this evening's adventures would have made you somewhat coy of an open boat."

"Ordinarily it would have been so, but now—have we consulted quite enough as regards our future action, think you?"

"I thought we had, as regards the immediate future, though you must know that I am happy to continue deliberations indefinitely—with you."

"Thank you. There are several things that ought to be clearer between us, I think."

He bowed his head attentively, waiting for her to begin.

Though there was no moon, the starlight had brightened greatly. The shallop was slipping easily through the shimmering water, Mingo and little Starlight—the latter having returned from his errand in time for the duty—sitting silently forward, with but little to do but drowse and dream in the light, steadfast wind that was just bellying the peaceful sail.

"First, Mr. Ensco—"

"Rowlock, or just Ensco, if you please, Miss Delorme. I thought it was a bargain between us."

"So it was. Then why 'Miss Delorme' me?"

"I shan't forget again."

"Neither shall I, Ensco. In the first place, then, as to that rendezvous of the desperadoes at Bowery Bay."

"Yes."

"When are we to make a descent upon it?"

"We?"

"Exactly. I shall personally share all the perils hereafter."

"Ha!"

"Perhaps you do not credit me with the requisite nerve and fortitude?"

"I think you have both."

"Or the necessary cleverness?"

"I know you have that. But—"

"But what?"

"You are a young lady—a beautiful and refined young lady."

"Thank you. But no matter. I hope before

this night is over to convince you quite thoroughly of my proficiency in *camaraderie* as the French would say, no matter how dangerous or how arduous."

"I hope you may, Inez."

"You shall see. Now when is it to be—that descent upon the rendezvous you know?"

"Within twenty-four hours, at the furthest. I shall have to think it over."

"Shall any of the regular police assist?"

Rowlock made an impatient movement.

"Not at my invitation. You know, I have severed even my *quasi* connection with the public Detective Bureau, in order to be perfectly independent and untrammelled in this great sleuth-bunt of ours."

"True; and I am glad to remember it. Who will then accompany us?"

"Dago and the boatswain, together with Mingo and little Starlight yonder, ought to fill the bill."

"Good! You are familiar with the rendezvous, I think you intimated."

"Not wholly familiar; but I know the place."

"What is it like?"

"The rendezvous is a ruinous stone boat-house, about a mile from the new hotel and pleasure-grounds that have been established at Bowery Bay. A wild, desolate place, but approachable by both water and land."

"You think they can have no hint of our intention to surprise them there?"

"We must see to it that they receive none."

"Still, their tricking me with regard to your signal must be remembered."

"Ob, the twins are cunning—cunning as rats there's no denying that. Still, additional precautions are our only safeguard."

"Our main object is to run the twins to earth?"

"To nab 'em—yes, of course. Juan as our prime game; Vasco next; then any one of the satellites most likely to give them away at a pinch."

"And the senorina?"

"We must track her down to her most recent lair. Indeed, that is, after all, our main point. Zarapatta once cornered, the rest would be amazingly simplified."

"You will hold, then, to your theory that she is in or near New York?"

"Certainly; or until it is proved untenable beyond a doubt."

They were now passing under the light-house at the upper end of Blackwell's Island, Ensco having decided, for reasons that will be understood, upon giving Hell Gate a wide berth on the return trip.

Inez gave a little shiver, and then her hands clinched resolutely.

"Oh, if we may only take that terrible woman in the toils!" she exclaimed under her breath.

"You do not fear her then, so much as you did?"

"Far more so, I think. The very thought of her fills me with increased and nameless terror."

"And yet—"

"And yet I would dare any peril, encounter any horror to face her but once on fair terms—to compel the secret that is dearer than my life from her lips."

"Ah, the recovery of the jewel-chest! Yes; next to bringing the murderers to justice, that is the main object."

"You either do not or will not understand."

"Be more explicit, Inez."

"I did not refer either to jewel-chest or vengeance—at least not just then."

The young man bowed his face, that she might not see the troubled look in it.

"Of course I understand," said he, in a low voice. "It is your father and mother you refer to."

"Yes, yes!" she clasped her hands. "Remember my suspense, my anxiety! Is it not natural to me on this score?"

"Must natural, most becoming."

"And think how my grandfather died without divulging the secret of their whereabouts—their mysterious non-existence for me, their daughter—though the revelation was just trembling on his dying lips! But he did say that they are alive—that they are not dead!"

"Ay; but better dead!"

He was still not looking up.

"Ensco!"

"Well, Inez?"

"You are a man of mysteries—of a mysterious past."

"You say so, my friend."

"You have confessed as much to me."

"Be it so."

"Apart from our immediate relations in this dreadful murder-quest, in which you are so frank, so confidential with me, you are wholly unknown, wholly an enigma, to me."

"Well?"

"Ensco, you know something of my parents."

"I?"

"Yes; I am sure of it. I feel instinctively that the secret of their absence, their non-appearance, their disgrace, if disgrace it be, is wholly or in part in your possession."

Her voice and manner were wildly beseeching, but he made no answer.

"That is well—very well!"

"I am glad to have you say that. Good-night, then! You must go now."

He looked at her with mingled surprise and admiration.

She had suddenly grown perfectly composed.

"When shall I hear from you?" And, receiving back the key, she made a movement to lead the way out.

"Sometime to-morrow—either by Mingo or little Starlight," he replied, but without moving.

"Why don't you come?"

"Can't you guess?"

She looked him in the face, and was silent.

The confession of agonized solicitude, the love, the fear of leaving her alone in the slumbering house, that was written there, was unmistakable.

It was as much a declaration as the one that he could have poured forth in passionate utterance, but would not.

Was she pleased, or angry, or startled?

Slowly the tell-tale color mounted over the pure beauty of her countenance, blotting away its accustomed sweet pallor, as the blush of morn might overspread a lily-surface of some mountain lake.

Then she put out her hand impulsively, and he pressed it to his lips.

"Now will you go?" she repeated, softly.

"Ay, Inez, through fire and flood, to the end of the earth, at your bidding now!"

And he followed obediently, without another word.

After she had let him out, and the door was fastened between them, she paused trembling at the foot of the little stair.

She trembled, the blushes came and went at liberty now—a red republican riot in the lily kingdom of her face—her bosom rising and falling in sweet turbulence, the hand that he had kissed so passionately extended before her glowing eyes.

Then she kissed it herself in the same spot, kissed it repeatedly, after which she fluttered up the stairs, and was gone.

As for Rowlock Ensco, with a heart beating no less exultantly, though after man's wont with a fiercer throb, he first circled about the house with stealthy and observant steps.

He at last encountered Gilbert, the stalwart gardener, who had taken John's place on patrol duty an hour before.

"All serene?" queried the detective, whose goings and comings had become more or less familiar to the domestics.

"Yes, sir; all well," replied the man. "And the coachman reported the same to me."

"Well, keep an extra lookout to-night, Gilbert; and don't forget the whistles I taught you in case of an emergency. I shall be somewhere about."

"I sha'n't forget, sir."

Ensco continued his way toward the river, purposely avoiding the open lawn and keeping to one side, which led over some soft ground amid a shrubbery.

There was no path, but occasional glimpses of turf spaces more distinctly marked by the starlight, or less heavily shadowed by the shrubs and ornamental trees, than elsewhere.

At one of these he came to a sudden pause.

It was a patch of spongy turf, and it bore the fresh imprint of a human foot—a foot that had been incased in a small, aristocratically-shaped man's shoe or boot.

Now, years before, when the Martez twins had been rather conspicuous young men-about-town, they had been somewhat noted, like most Spanish-American youth, for the elegance and diminutiveness of their feet, as the detective had learned, together with other minor details.

This fact instantly recurred to him as he studied the impression before him.

But no other footprint had been left, the soil only being impressionable in that one place; and, save that it was freshly made, and indicated that the owner had been going toward the house—stealthily as a matter of course, or this unfrequented approach would not have been selected—nothing was to be made out of the discovery.

However, was not this a good deal?

Reluctantly leaving the footprint, he reached the boat-landing at last, where Mingo and the boy were found sufficiently on the alert.

Questioned, they were certain that nothing worth reporting had broken the monotony of their watch.

The adjoining street-end had long been wholly deserted; by water or land, not a single incident had attracted their attention.

Ensco leisurely began to pace the adjacent corner of the lawn, intending to watch, out the night, if needs were.

Presently he heard the whistling signal he had communicated to the domestic patrols.

CHAPTER XIII.

RESCUED AGAIN.

HE listened again to make sure.

It was repeated, this time unmistakably—three successive notes, long at either end, a short one in the middle.

It was from the further side of the grounds, close to the water front.

With a parting sign to the watchers in the boat, he darted in that direction.

But Gilbert was not on the spot.

Puzzled and angry, Ensco was about to seek him nearer the house, for an explanation, when the signal sounded again.

This time it was from the extreme rear of the grounds.

He hurried thither, but only to find that he had been again deceived.

No one was awaiting him there.

As he ground his teeth, and stood half-bewildered, a low laugh sounded tauntingly at his very shoulder.

He wheeled in a flash, but the utterer, if human utterer it had been, had effected a disappearance yet more swiftly.

He darted into a laurel clump, where the laugh seemed to have retreated in its expiring breath, but there was no one in hiding there.

Satisfied now that he had been systematically duped, he ran toward the spot where he had exchanged words with the gardener-patrol.

His misgivings were justified.

Gilbert lay face-downward in the grass, insensible from a severe contusion on the back of the head.

With some water from an old well, not far away, the detective speedily revived him sufficiently to sit up.

Even then the injured man was too dazed to comprehend inquiries until some brandy was trickled down his throat.

"I must have been knocked down from behind, sir, soon after you parted from me," was the substance of the explanation at last extracted from him. "Suddenly it seemed as if a house had fallen on the back of my skull, I felt the little whistle you had once given me being pulled out of my waistcoat pocket, and then I didn't know nothing."

"Ha! the grounds must be sown with eavesdroppers and spies. Here take another pull from this flask, and try to get on your pins. I shall make the circuit."

With that, Ensco dashed away.

But an observant circuit of the mansion revealed no sign of anything wrong.

Satisfied, however, that there was danger for Inez afoot, he returned to the landing.

Here a signal brought Mingo to his side, while another caused little Starlight to lay off with the boat at a considerable distance from the float.

Accompanied by the negro, Ensco had just turned, with the intention of beating up through the grounds on the Eighty-sixth street side, when something hurtled out of an adjoining clump, and he felt the back of his neck fanned, as by a dashing bolt.

"What was that?" he exclaimed.

"This!" replied Mingo, with an angry grunt.

And he jerked a still quivering bowie-knife out of an adjacent fence, into which it was deeply imbedded.

Ensco mechanically put his hand to the top of his spine, while the African, with a guttural sort of roar, leaped into the clump from which the weapon had been hurled.

The detective followed, but no discovery was made.

At that instant there was something like a stifled cry from somewhere far back.

"Quick!" ejaculated Ensco. "No humbug this time."

They were up and away like a pair of bloodhounds let fly.

Two men, with a white-robed burden between, having just crossed the space between the side of the house and the embankment overlooking the street, were in the act of descending the latter to a large close coach in waiting below.

A neighboring street-lamp lent its effulgency to the uncertain starshine.

The white-robed burden was made out to be a graceful female figure, apparently unresisting and motionless.

But at Ensco's challenging shout, a white hand, with a jeweled flash from the fingers, was waved in mute entreaty.

There was but one other such a hand in the world, so white, so small, so perfectly-shaped—its fellow-member belonging to Inez Delorme.

"Coming! coming!" shouted the detective; and his feet were winged to the rescue, as was no less the sable giant's at his heels.

Were they too late?

Yes; for they were but at the top of the embankment as the captive was thrust into the coach, with a low moan, and a pair of strong arms—but woman's arms, for all that—seized and sunk back with her into the darkness of the interior.

No; for the next instant, and just as the horses were being lashed forward, the Harbor Detective, covered with dust from his hand-spring down to the curb, was wrenching open the door with a grasp that frenzy rendered irresistible.

"No, not too late, for he had even grasped the form of the young girl, and was tearing it out of the woman's arms."

A drawn poniard was in the latter's hand, her

eyes blazed like a basilisk's through her black veil.

"Drive on, *cochero*!" she screamed in Spanish to the coachman; "gallop! run! burn the road with your speed! Jago! Pedro! do you slumber?"

At the same instant she struck full at the detective's breast, but ineffectually through her desire to avoid hurting the girl, while the horses made a great bound forward.

But there they remained, pawing at the air, as if anchored to a hillside.

It might as well have been so, for Mingo, after knocking down the two men, had grasped the hind wheels and, with his feet thoroughly braced was holding the vehicle immovable.

"Stick to it, Marse Rowlock!" he shouted from behind. "I'ze get de bullgine dead to rights."

Rowlock was sticking to it.

But just at that moment he tore himself and his burden out from between the wheels.

None too soon; for simultaneously Mingo was staggered from his foothold by an immense fragment of rock, thrown from behind, striking him between the shoulders, the wheels were torn from his grasp, and the carriage shot on up the street-rise.

As it did so, the unveiled face of its baffled occupant appeared at the coach window.

It was the same face—white, beautiful, powerful, serpent-eyed—that had momentarily revealed itself in the light-house flash from the deck of the phantom-like steam-launch, though now positively diabolical in the intensity of its malevolence and defeated purpose.

"Ensco, beware!" was hissed out at parting. "The picture on your arm—it is but a mid-fight contest, in which the White Sibyl of Morona wins at last!"

Face and voice were no sooner materialized than they were gone.

But the noise of the disturbance had not failed to attract outside attention.

Several policemen were seen running down from the top of the rise, near the East River Park corner.

"Head off that coach!" roared Rowlock, in a stentorian voice. "A crime has been attempted, and the culprit is within."

He had just time to note that the officers were succeeding in heading off and detaining the equipage when Mingo staggered unsteadily up to him.

"What yer gwine ter do now, Marse Rowlock?" he faltered out, bewilderedly.

"What's the matter with you?"

"Spect I war stabbed in the back wiff a bow-sprit, Marse Rowlock. Lor! you don't reckon I'd hev dropped dem wheels without bein' killed, does yer?"

"You're a trump, Mingo! But what has become of those two ruffians?"

"Dunno. 'Spect dey must hev wriggled off to dere snake-holes."

"No matter now. Come with me to the coach. We've got the queen-snake scotched at last."

And still carrying the insensible Inez in his arms, the detective led the way up the street.

The officers had just finished detaining the coach and quieting the horses, while the coachman, an honest enough looking fellow, apparently both frightened and mystified, was already in custody.

Ensco briefly explained the case.

All the officers had recognized him, for he had a sterling reputation behind him.

"Is the young lady injured?" asked one of them, respectfully.

"No; only in a faint," and Ensco glanced down into the sweet upturned face. "She is coming to herself already. But be quick; her would-be abductor is inside."

"Who is it in here?" demanded another officer, and he strided to the coach-door.

"The wickedest, the most dangerous woman in the whole world!" exclaimed the detective, impressively. "God be praised! her career is checked at last."

CHAPTER XIV.

COME AND GONE.

HERE the officer opened the coach-door and unceremoniously thrust his head within.

"No, she isn't! No, it ain't!" he called out, in refutation of the solemn averments of the detective. "The coach is empty. Holy smoke! not by a jugfull, either."

And he darted back to avoid the spring of a large yellow serpent, that darted past him and was gone into a neighboring lot with the rapidity of a cast lance.

"We can't swear that Smith's got 'em this time, sure!" said another policeman. "I saw the varmint myself, and will make my affidavit to it."

"Saw it?" echoed the coach-opener, who was mopping his brow with a trembling hand. "I'd just time to notice it coiled up on the cushion when it jumped full at my throat."

"What can it mean?" asked the third, in an appalled tone.

Ensco, who was now in haste to carry Inez to the house, offered a hurried explanation.

"The Senora Zarapatta Martez," said he, "for that is the name of the dangerous woman I expected to find in the coach, is a tropical woman, and her fondness for such pets used to be well known."

"Pets!"

"Just so. You've had a lucky escape, Smith. It was the yellow adder of Honduras that flew at you—one of the deadliest snakes known."

"But the woman herself?" demanded the roundsman. "Did you see her in the coach, Rowlock?"

"Distinctly. In fact, she aimed a blow at me with a dagger just as I was tearing this young lady out of her grasp—at the moment the horses started up the hill."

"But how could she have escaped?"

"Save your conundrums for your prisoner there—they knock me out. Excuse me now. Mingo here will tell you further particulars while I convey this young lady to her home."

He then hurried away, with his wholly or half-conscious burden still in his arms.

To his astonishment, however, he had no sooner entered the seclusion of the grounds than she quietly released herself from his embrace.

"What!" he exclaimed, joyfully; "you are yourself again."

She was standing half-guiltily before him, her head bowed that her blushes might not betray her.

"Yes," she replied, in a low voice.

"And have been for how long?"

"For some minutes—I hated to have those men see me come to in—in such a ridiculous position."

"Then you saw the snake incident?"

"Perfectly."

"And without crying out?"

"Yes. Why should I have cried out. It was horrible, to be sure; but then I—I felt so safe, so secure, so protected, that—" she could not go on.

But Rowlock went on, and to greater purpose than he had dreamed of an instant before.

She had nestled of her own will in his protecting arms; their fond pressure of her lovely form had been neither offensive nor distasteful.

"Inez, I love you!" he burst forth. "Your image is in my thoughts by day, my dreams by night! Oh, give me the best of all rights to protect and guard you henceforth! I love you!"

Her head was still bent, her figure—the embodiment of perfect grace and rounded symmetry in its white dressing-robe of delicate, clinging material trimmed and festooned with rich lace—strangely agitated in a way he had never marked before.

A great fear came over him—a fear lest he might have lost all in risking so much.

"Have I offended you by my rashness?" he faltered. "Does it shock you to have me say that I love you?"

"N-n-no, not exactly that," was her scarcely audible reply. "In fact, I—I don't particularly dislike it."

Then she raised her face, whose garden of roses was so much more eloquent than words.

Enesco caught her to his heart.

"What! you love me—you love me in return?" he gasped.

She only nestled closer.

"But say it! My life, my fate, my beautiful! let me hear you say it."

Her response was like the far murmurings of a harp of gold, swept by the fingers of fate at the portals of the inmost citadel of love.

"Love you? Oh, my darling! I have done so from the very first."

After the drought the shower, after the shower the rain, after the rain the downpour, the deluge!

Their lips met, and then there were "kisses sweeter, sweeter than anything on earth," as Tennyson sings.

"How did it all happen?" he asked, when they had recovered from their transports.

"What happen—this? I hardly know. It was all your doing, darling."

Another embrace and more kisses.

"No, no; I mean the abduction."

"Oh!"

"You can't have forgotten that."

"I partly did for a few moments."

"What was the first you knew of it?"

"I was just sitting down, after partly undressing, intending to quiet my nerves with a French novel before getting to my rest."

"Yes."

"Sarah hadn't awakened. I could hear her snoring peacefully in the adjoining small room."

"Well."

"Suddenly my room door opened, and two men entered. Before I could call out they seized me, one of them pressing a damp handkerchief over my mouth and nostrils."

"Ha! chloroform."

"Doubtless, or something similar. At all events, I lost my senses."

"Altogether?"

"All was in confusion at first. At one time I seemed to hear you shout, and I tried to cry out, to wave my hand to you."

"Yes; you did both."

"After that all was blank, until—you know when."

"The men—did you get a fair view of their faces before being overpowered?"

"Yes."

"Any recognition?"

"Yes; I dimly recognized them both."

"You recognized them?"

"Yes, as two Spaniards, named Jago and Pedro, who used to visit the twins occasionally when they lived with my grandfather."

"Ha! Creatures of the senorina, no doubt."

"Most likely."

"But how could they have entered the house, secured as it is?"

"I haven't the least idea."

"Let us make an examination."

As it was now near daybreak, they aroused the household upon re-entering the mansion, as being most fit and proper.

An examination proved that access had first been obtained to the roof by means of the lightning-rod, whence the descent into the house had been made by forcing a trap-door.

After that, the side-door on the ground floor near the library had been opened, when the task of the would-be kidnappers had been greatly simplified.

As for the previous mysteries experienced by the detective—the false signals, which had so deluded him, and the incident of the bowie-knife—they were left to conjecture, and nothing that either the gardener or the coachman could suggest threw any light upon the business.

There was an early breakfast, at which Enesco was forced to remain, Mrs. Twiggs no less urgent than Inez in urging it.

Before his departure, he was ceremoniously introduced by the young lady to both the housekeeper and Sarah, the maid, as her prospective husband.

"I'm not astonished one bit," was the good old lady's comment. "My dear Nessie, Mr. Enesco will make you an excellent husband, I am sure. And may the Lord safely see you out of it, say I!"

"See us out of what, Aunt Twiggs?" asked Inez.

"Out of the robbin' an' murderin' an' kidnappin', an' everything! Bless me, my dears! do you really expect to live through it?"

"We'll try to," said Enesco, laughing, as he took Nessie's hand.

"Well, you're not going to get married in a hurry, I hope."

"Not till my grandfather is avenged and the jewel-chest recovered," said Inez, quickly. "On that I am determined."

The detective sighed a little disappointedly, but the justice and appropriateness of her decision were too apparent to be disputed.

"As you will, Nessie; you know best," was all he said.

"I thought it best to make the matter public," she whispered, when bidding him good-by a few moments later. "Now there can be no spiteful or underhanded talk, you know."

He pressed her in his arms.

"That was right," he said. "But—"

"But what?"

"Mightn't we work up our case a little better if married right away?"

"No; but quite the contrary. Your own cooler judgment will tell you so, darling."

"True," he admitted.

"Good-by now. Oh, Rowlock! it tears my heart to part with you now, but it must be. We are both in need of rest and recuperation. Good-by!"

He held out his hands.

"God keep you in the interval!" he exclaimed.

"I shall not be far from you. And you will have that trap-door secured without delay?"

"Trust me for that. When shall I have word from you?"

"Probably this evening. But either Mingo or I will be on the watch constantly hereabouts."

As the detective was hurrying toward the boat-landing, where he expected to find Mingo awaiting him, he was overtaken by Nessie's English waiting-maid, Sarah Gubbins, who came running after him with a large well-filled paper-bag.

Sarah was an unadulterated Cockney of middle-age, tall, gaunt and angular, with plain features and a red nose, whose fidelity to her young mistress was only equaled by her good opinion of herself.

"Ere, sir, ere you are!" said she, breathless. "Something good to heat, what Mrs. Twiggs thought your assistants might be 'ungry for, you know."

"Thank you," said the detective, gratefully, accepting the package. "I should have thought of asking you for something for them. Take good care of your young lady, Sarah. She is dearer than ever to me now."

He was about to go, but she detained him again.

"I'll remember w'at you say, Mr. Hensco, but 'old 'on a minute, please."

"What is it, my good woman?"

"Well, you see, sir, hafter the 'orriyfin' hevnts of last night—them 'orrid men as would kidnap beautiful, unpertected young things, ugh!—I naturally, sir, feel more hanxious than bever."

"Naturally enough."

"Tell me, Mr. Hensco, will there still be such awful danger of bein' kerried off out of bed by them awful men, do you think?"

"I think not, with the fresh precautions that will be taken. I think Miss Delorme need not fear another attempt at abduction, at least out of her own rooms."

"Oh, but I didn't hallude to her danger, at hall hevnts, not to that alone, you know."

"Ah—oh!"

"You see, I sleep in them same rooms, Mr. Hensco."

"You must sleep more lightly hereafter, then."

"Lord! that's just the 'orror of it, sir. I can't. An w'at if I should be habducted in my sleep, you know?"

Rowlock with difficulty abstained from laughter, and presently made his escape, after leaving the good woman some comforting assurances of a highly complimentary nature.

In a few minutes he was once more on his way back to the Seamew, with Mingo and little Starlight enjoying the provisions he brought them with the best of appetites.

Mingo had reported going to the police station with the officers and their prisoner, the hackman, who had been committed to a cell, though it was the opinion of the sergeant in charge that the man had not been guilty of any intentional wrong-doing.

"So!" said the detective, who had already formed the same opinion.

Subsequent examination proved the innocence of the hack-driver in the affair, and he was discharged, without being able to furnish any clew to the woman who had engaged his services on that occasion.

"Mingo," said Rowlock, "let me take a look at that bowie-knife that so nearly skewered the back of my neck."

The weapon was placed in his hands.

CHAPTER XV.

COMRADES STILL.

A BRIEF examination was sufficient to satisfy the detective.

It was an admirable, though hideously suggestive, weapon, of Mexican workmanship.

Engraved on the buckhorn handle were the initials, "Z. M.," significant of the full name, Zarapatta Martez.

"It may come in use as a companion witness of the sapphire ring," muttered Rowlock, as he clasped the knife and slipped it into his pocket. "Doubtless the poniard, with which the fair Sibyl lunged so thirstily at my heart, would have been similarly inscribed had it come into my possession."

Then he gave a slight shudder at the recollection of his Inez having suffered the contamination of that woman's grasp; though he could not help remembering, also, her anxiety to avoid injuring the girl, to which circumstance alone he doubtless owed his own escape from her fury.

The yacht was reached without further interruption.

The detective was very industrious thereafter, and he permitted three days to elapse before seeking another interview with Inez.

This abstention was not maintained but at the cost of much self-denying violence to his inclinations.

But he thought it for the best in more ways than one, and was, moreover, in receipt of constant reports as to the young girl's security from one or another of his faithful messengers.

However, on the morning of the fourth day he found himself hurrying up the shaded lawn from the boat-landing, with a loudly beating heart, to keep an appointment with her.

As she stepped out from a little summer-house to meet him, he sprang forward with extended arms.

To his astonishment—for they were out of observation—she made a gesture of dissent; though there was nothing but love for him in her eyes and face, which otherwise wore a serious and firm expression.

"Not again, dear!" said she, quietly. "Not again, at least, till—you know when."

"What! no more endearments?"

"Not one."

"Until when?"

"Can you ask? Until our detective-quest is at an end—our oath of comradeship fulfilled."

He made a gesture of acquiescence, after a painful hesitation.

"You are always right, little comrade," said he. "So be it!"

And he merely pressed the hand that was now freely tendered to him.

"It cost me a struggle, too," she observed. "But I knew I was right." "Lover joy, sweet as it is, and work—the kind of work before us—cannot go together."

"Of course, not. I shall have you sometime—God speed the hour!"

"Amen! What news do you bring me?"

"We make the descent upon the Bowery Bay rendezvous to-night."

"So soon? But I shall be ready."

"Do you think you are quite equal to it, as yet?"

"I know I am. Look!" she held out her hand. "Firm as a rock!"

"And lovelier, fairer than a Greek statue's!" She frowned commendably.
 "No more such talk—at least, not yet awhile—or we shall quarrel. But really, I have ceased to have any nerves, at all."
 "Or, still better, say that you are all nerve of the right sort."

"That is what I meant."
 "You may need it all."
 "What are my instructions?"
 "You will join me at the Astoria dock at dusk this evening."

"By what means?"
 "The ferry-boat."
 "So!"
 "Yes; and little Starlight will be with you."
 "You cannot come for me, then, in the yacht's boat?"

"No; your last adventures were sufficient in that line. Besides, the public ferry will be safer—less room for treachery. After that, you will be with me."

"Good!"
 "You had better come in disguise."
 "Which of my disguises?"
 "As you may determine."

At this juncture there was a suspicious stir outside the summer-house, in which the interview was going on.

Rowlock was out of it in a flash.
 "No one there!" said he, returning. "However, let us talk in the open sunlight. After what has happened, I almost feel suspicious of the very air we breathe."

"So do I," said Inez. "Not only walls, but trees and bushes may have ears."

They acted accordingly.
 "You will then meet me at Astoria?" continued Inez.

"What is your plan?"
 "It is as yet not wholly determined."
 "The attack will be made by boat?"
 "Chiefly."

"And I shall accompany it?"
 "I can't tell yet. Perhaps, you and Starlight will be sent on as *avant couriers*. Then your disguises would come into play."

"I shall take a selection of them with me."
 "That will be well."

"You must have made some discoveries in the past few days."

"A few, and good ones."
 "What are they?"

"In the first place, by to-night, or to-morrow at the furthest, I hope to have tracked *La Senorina* to her city residence."

Inez instantly grew more anxious.
 "That woman! Thank Heaven, I was not conscious when in her grasp! Had it been otherwise, I fear her contact would have destroyed me."

Or one of her pet snakes, I told you about, might have made your acquaintance. However, she mostly has them in subjection, I haven't a doubt."

Inez drew a long breath.
 "What a woman!"

"However, she was earnestly solicitous of your safety, or her dagger might have tasted of my blood."

"Thank God for that! So you told me. You think she secretly resides in the city, then?"

"I am almost sure of it; probably in the annexed district."

"Well, what next?"

"Juan and Vasco continue to cover their tracks admirably. But I have been very careful. My contemplated descent upon their fastness—even my knowledge of its existence—can hardly be suspected by them."

"Oh, may it prove so! And you hope to capture them?"

"Such is my hope—and perhaps the mother, as well. She has been known to visit the rendezvous."

There was a long pause, after which the detective held out his hand.

"To-night, then?"
 "Yes; but don't go yet."

"There is no hurry."

And the detective sighed inwardly, he so wanted to take her in his arms, or, barring that, to escape the temptation.

"There are several puzzling things, Ensco, that I wish to ask you about."

"You have but to speak, Inez."

"First, then, how do you account for the Sibyl's strange evanishment out of that coach?"

"I don't attempt to account for it."

"Might she have slipped out on the opposite side, directly after relinquishing me to your grasp, and so made her escape up into the Park grounds?"

"It is just possible. But, as I have said, everything about that woman is simply unaccountable—unknowable."

"Unknowable?"

"For the present, at least. We must content ourselves with being agnostics, so far as she is concerned, until we have her in our very clutches."

"Ah! Heigh-ho!"

"Do not be despondent, however. What next?"

"That woman! Could she have had time to engage in that attempt to abduct me, so soon

after we saw her on the phantom steam-launch as I call it?"

"Undoubtedly; since she *did* engage in it."

"But doesn't that prove that the lawless band, with which she and the twins are associated, must have some nearer rendezvous than Bowery Bay?"

"They have, doubtless, many such; but the successive incidents of that eventful night do not especially prove it."

"Why not?"

"She may have had all the assistance necessary on the launch, and then landed anywhere in this vicinity."

"True."
 "What next?"

"Where did you get little Starlight from?"

"From a rather mysterious couple in the vicinity of Bowery Bay. I believe he was a sort of adopted son, but they readily enough adopted him into my service. You may see something of them before long."

"Are they in your interest?"
 "Yes; and as true as steel."

"Yet mysterious, you say?"
 The detective hesitated.

"Well, but little can be told of their antecedents, you see. The man is a fisherman. Name is Emrold. A queer one, eh?"

"Very. And the boy's, too; though hardly his proper one, of course."

"Starlight? No; I gave him that name, from the queer way in which I formed his acquaintance. I may tell you of it some time."

"You won't forget?"
 "Not I. What next?"

"Next and last—this also concerns a name, and is also somewhat personal."

"Indeed! What name?"
 "Your own."

The detective winced a little, but then smiled.
 "Mine?"

"Yes; of course, Rowlock is not your real Christian name."

"You say so, my dear."
 "But is it, now?"

"Don't you like it?"
 "Of course I do. But is it?"

"No."
 "What is your real given name?"

"Do you think you ought to know?"
 "Indeed I do!" This with a sense of proprietorship particularly flattering.

"So do I." A little reluctantly.
 "What is it, then?"

"Douglass."
 Inez clasped her hands.

"What a lovely name! But I felt certain it would prove so."

"You like it, then?"
 "I adore it! Besides, can I forget it in my favorite song?"

"What song is that?"
 "You shall hear me sing it often enough after—I mean," with a blush, "some time."

"But what is it?"
 "'Douglass, Douglass, tender and true.'"

"Ah! But, by the way, comrade—"
 "What now?"

"I wish you would content yourself with Rowlock—at least, for the present."

"Certainly." Though a little disappointedly.
 "*Au revoir*, comrade."

"Wait; you haven't told me how you came to be called Rowlock."

"I can't—not now. *Au revoir*!"

They had risen from the tree-encircling garden seat they had been occupying, and stood with their right hands clasped.

"One moment!" persisted the girl. "Somehow I fear to let you go—I dread that something may come between us."

"Inez, my more than friend, my best beloved! Nothing, I think, can come between us more."

There was a hurtling, whistling sound, a swift flash in the bright air, and a bowie knife was quivering in the tree, having passed directly between their faces.

"Again!" cried the detective, with a sort of exasperated roar.

And then he dashed like a tiger into the line of cedar clumps from which the weapon had been unmistakably projected.

Inez was very pale when he returned, shaking his head, and with a troubled look on his brow.

"I can't understand it. By Jupiter! it beats me out!"

And, plucking out the knife, he doggedly resumed his seat.

CHAPTER XVI.

AN EXPEDITION.

His dejection was so great that Inez, though greatly terrified herself, did not venture to disturb him.

Presently, however, as he did not look up, she took the knife out of his hands and examined it.

"Exactly the same pattern of knife as the one launched at me on that eventful night," he muttered.

"The design upon the weapon is alone different."

He had sent her word of the former incident, and she eagerly scrutinized the buckhorn handle.

"There is nothing here," she exclaimed.
 "Look on the blade."
 She did so, and then uttered a startled cry.
 "Good heavens! an exact duplicate of the tattooed design upon your arm!"

"Even so."

He took the clasp-knife from her, closed it, and put it out of sight.

"*Au revoir*," and he once more held out his hand.

"But, oh, my friend, my love! this is more than mysterious. It is dreadful—appalling."

"True, my poor child, but what can we do? We can only hope."

"And trust in God," she added, fervently.

Then she gave him her hand, and they separated without another word.

Rowlock did not return directly to the boat that had brought him from the yacht.

Moodily pondering over this last alarming incident, he gained the street, and kept along it till he came to a small German wine-shop, which he entered.

The proprietress, a comely woman, signed him toward a private room in the rear.

Entering this, he found Tom Gaff, the boat-swain of the *Seamew*, evidently expecting him over a glass of something that looked stronger than German wine.

"Ah, sir; I knowed you'd come in season," and Gaff nodded sagaciously as the detective seated himself at the little table.

A likely-looking sailor-man, this Tom Gaff, with a shrewd face, a pair of keen, cold gray eyes, of stocky and powerful build, and for the nonce with but little of the toiling seafarer in his air or dress.

"Well!" demanded the detective.

"Its good goods, sir."

"Then the clew was not a misleading one?"

"Not by a long shot."

"You have located the woman?"

"Yes, sir-ree!"

"Where?"

"At Hunt's Point."

"So near?"

"It's shady, though."

"What sort of a house?"

"No house, at all."

"What?"

"Unless you call a canal-boat a house."

"Give me the particulars."

"I tracked that duck, Jago, what you described to me, to the place. It's one of these here laid-up hulks what's been turned into a dwelling. Jago made sure he wasn't being foltered—that is, he thought he made sure—and then hopped over a long plank, an' disappeared into it."

"What then?"

"Then, pretty soon, some one peeped up out of the hulk."

"Who was that?"

"The woman you warned me of. Ugh!" he gave a shiver, and drained his tumbler. "No mistake, Mr. Ensco. She fairly gave me the aguer."

"Describe the face."

Gaff did so.

"The same!" muttered the detective.

Then he consulted his watch.

"Eleven, scant!"

"Time enough."

"Could we reconnoiter by water, and get back to the *Seamew* by return of tide by the middle of the afternoon?"

"In a racing shell, and with me at the oars, yes."

"Such a one is doubtless procurable. Come!"

"Won't you have a drink with me before we go, Mr. Ensco?"

"No; but as you want another, I'll take a igar."

A racing shell was not to be had, but a club working-boat, almost the same thing, was obtained; and, half an hour later, they pushed off from the float of the Harlem Boating Club.

"Don't forget me, if you have an adventure on hand, Rowlock," called out an athletic, gentlemanly-looking young man from the edge of the float.

It was Wright Vanderlynn, a club member and one of Ensco's acquaintances, to whom he was indebted for the loan of the boat.

Ensco and his companion to a pause, after feathering their oars from the initial stroke, which had not quite carried them beyond hearing.

The former reflected, and then answered back:

"Do you mean one with a spice of danger in it, Vanderlynn?"

"Ay, my boy, that I do! and the more the merrier."

"You know where the *Seamew* lies?"

"At Astoria?"

"Yes."

"Good!"

"Be there at an hour before dusk to-night."

"Is there genuine tough work in prospect?" This in an eager tone.

"All you want."

"Count me in, and a thousand thanks, Rowlock!"

The sculls caught the water again, and the light craft shot away.

"Chap looked summat like a tea-party swell!" commented Gaff.

"But a capital fellow withal, and the boss fighter of his club," replied the detective. "We're not so many-handed but that he may be of use at a pinch."

They were both in the club working-uniform, thanks to the further kindness of Mr. Vanderlynn—striped shirts, broad white belts and red nomenclatures, with the addition of broad, slouching straw hats—and presently the detective made another pause to add a huge pair of false whiskers, English style, to the side of his face.

"Perhaps it will avail me little in view of such penetration as La Senorina's," said he, "but it won't do to throw away any chance. You are all right without any more fixing," a little enviously, to Gaff.

"True for you!" cried the other, who was pulling stern-stroke. "The cut of my jib, thank the Lord! is as yet unknown to her Highness or the devil-twins."

"Catch stroke!"

"One minute!" and, producing a handy flask, back tilted the sailor's head with its mouth to his lips.

Enesco frowned, but said nothing, though the bottle was one of the otherwise invaluable Tom's besetting sins.

The sculls after this were plied so steadily that in less than an hour they were skirting Hunt's Point.

This is a bold, rather rugged point of land, rapidly being built over, near the confluence of Bronx River with the Harlem, (here beginning to form the island-thronged, gradually-widening neck of Long Island Sound,) and four or five miles from the Third Avenue Bridge.

"There you are!" and Gaff began to ease up. "Lying just under the roadside bluff yonder."

Enesco paused on his oars to observe the spot indicated.

"Oho!" he muttered; "so Madame la Senorina has fitted up that hulk as her secret palace."

"Do you recognize it as an old acquaintance, sir?"

"I should say so. It used to be a beer and eating-saloon, much patronized by road and river sports. Before that—Ah! there is the connecting link of the senorina's present occupancy."

"How so?"

"Well, now I remember that, originally, before it was a decent saloon, the place was an infernally murderous hole, kept by one Garcia, a Spaniard at that, and a common resort of river and harbor criminals."

"Ah, I see. Well, here's luck to the hulk as she blossoms to-day." And back went Gaff's head again, with the flask to his lips.

Enesco lost patience.

"I wish you wouldn't," he said, angrily. "We've too much at stake for you to run any risk."

"But, bless your top-lights, Mr. Enesco, I ain't a-runnin' any!"

"You are, though! The drink has more than once ruined your chances, Tom, and you know it."

Gaff scratched his head, and then, as if under a sudden impulse, tossed the flask overboard.

The detective's brow cleared.

"Come, now, that is something like!" said he, encouragingly.

"Thank you, sir," was Tom's grateful rejoinder, though he added in his own thoughts: "You wouldn't think so, if you knew as how I'd drained the last drop afore chuckin' the flask away." And he then continued, aloud: "Howsomever, sir, there was inspiration in that last pull I took."

"In what way?"

"It gave me an idea—a reg'lar head-light, Mr. Rowlock!"

"Let me have it."

"A good thing on the senora! Why not boldly board her boat-dwellin' at the water-side door, an' putend as how we take it to be still a beer and lunch crib?"

"Good!"

"Yes, sir! We can be sort of slow to discover our fluke, an' in the mean time mebbe spy into all the old gal's secrets."

"If we get a mere inkling of what Zarapatta Martez would hide from the world, we'll be more than fortunate. However, nothing venture, nothing have. Catch stroke!"

The boat shot on again, this time directed full at the hulk under consideration, less than a mile away.

"Be careful now of your part," cautioned Enesco, as the oars were slipped and moorings made. "The least indiscretion may ruin all."

"Hurrah!" cried Gaff, with assumed heartiness; "beer's my weakness, my boy, and there's lots of it inside, or I'm a horse-marine."

This was well enough, though the detective watched a little nervously his companion's manner in tumbling up over the hulk's side, fearing that his happy-go-lucky air might not be altogether assumed, after all.

But they were in for it now, and, accepting the risks, he followed his companion.

If the outside of the hulk was battered, weather-worn and uninviting enough—which it

certainly was, together with the deck—there was a coquettish little striped awning over the companionway, and a glance down into this revealed a tidiness, and even elegance, that promised greatly for what might lie in the interior beyond.

Above deck, the place was wholly deserted.

"Come on, friend!" cried Gaff, continuing the rollicking role, though Enesco remarked with increased uneasiness that he was really unsteady on his pins. "There used to be beer on draught here, and there must be now. Moreover, I'm as dry as a gun-wad."

And he forthwith blundered down the steps, the other close upon his heels.

But the door at the foot of the companionway was suddenly opened, and they stood confronted by a commanding presence.

It was that of a veiled lady, graceful but majestic, in a light gauzy morning-gown of black lace, the face being hidden, save the eyes—which were large, melancholy and magnetic—by a lace mantilla arranged around the head and bust after the charming custom of Spanish-American fine ladies.

Diamonds could be seen glittering at the throat and ears; the shapely hands were loaded with rings of a like costly setting; and nothing could exceed the mingled courtesy and inquiry of her quiet bearing.

"To what am I indebted for this unexpected visit, senors?"

She spoke in English, though with apparent difficulty, while her voice was indescribably soft and melodious.

"We axes your pardon, ma'm!" swaggered the sailor; "an' I can speak Mexican, if you prefer, since I'm a sea-dog, at your service, with every lingo on the round earth at my tongue's end."

"Quien est, senor?"

Gaff hesitated, smacked his lips, and then reeled off a yard or two of atrocious Spanish with regard to the thirsty errand of the pair.

The lady courteously explained in a few words the mistake that was being made.

"Sad news for thirsty men!" growled Tom, with an ogling look, in spite of Enesco's rebuking hand upon his shoulder. "At any rate, ma'm, we might carry away with us a glimpse of your figure-head, to make up for our disappointment."

"Certano, senors!" And, with a low laugh, she drew back her mantilla.

"The Lord preserve us!" ejaculated the sailor, and he stumbingly recoiled into Enesco's arms; "is it a sea-witch or Davy Jones's wife?"

CHAPTER XVII.

THE SIBYL AT HOME.

TOM GAFF'S excitement and alarm were not to be wondered at, for, though he had once before caught a glimpse of senorina's terrible face, to thus encounter it at close quarters for the first time was to experience a decidedly disconcerting effect.

Terribly beautiful—beautifully terrible—bloodless, yet instinct with life, calm, yet the index of activities—impassive, yet mobile, somber, mysterious, grand, gloomy and peculiar!

Such are the adjectives that would involuntarily arise in the presence of that face, and still would not adequately describe it.

"You must excuse my friend's excitement, madam," said Enesco, apologetically. "He is a rough sailor, little used to the revelation of—of extraordinary feminine charms. I regret the mistake that has been made. We shall take ourselves off at once."

And he bowed, with one hand on his heart, while steadying Tom with the other.

The lady smiled.

"Apologies are unnecessary, and why should you go?" she murmured. "Since I have made my abode in this queer place, similar misapprehensions have not unnaturally occurred."

"You are generous, madam."

"Not at all. Enter, senors. If this is no longer a public house, that is no reason why you should go away without refreshments."

"You're a stunner, ma'am!" cried Gaff, who had by this time recovered his composure. "Thank-ee a million times, for we are dry arter our long pull at the oars."

She smiled again, and forthwith ushered them into a cabin that had been fitted up as a little saloon regardless of expense.

Here she placed before them a profusion of wines and dainties.

"I am, perforce, my own servant at present," said she, as the two men, after a little further urging, proceeded to help themselves. "But you are none the less welcome, senors. You will excuse me from not joining you, I hope, though I shall avail myself of this opportunity to treat my pets to a few tidbits."

She accordingly sunk into an enormous upholstered chair, emitting a soft cooing sound, and instantly became covered with snakes.

They were of all sizes and patterns; they came as if by magic out of the billowy crevices and undulations of the chair; they twined about her arms, her neck, her bosom, the air was filled with their sharp but contented sibilations.

Tom Gaff had just downed his third glass of

iced claret, and had been thinking of trolling out a song in gratitude for so much unexpected hospitality, when this remarkable exhibition took place.

Now he stood as if petrified.

"Great Scott!" was about all he could ejaculate. "Have I got the jim-jams, or am I in a Hindoo snake-charmer's palace?"

"Ah! but you mustn't mind my pets," said the senora, as she began to feed them with spoonfuls of milk. "They are harmless and beautiful. Don't you think them lovely?"

"Candidly speaking, ma'am, I don't," replied Gaff, rapidly opening a fresh bottle and then brimming a tall celery glass with the red wine. "I really don't mean to be wantin' in appreciation, you know, but—well, ma'am, snakes is snakes!" And he forthwith began to toss off the unconscionable bumper.

"And you, sir?" she smilingly turned to Enesco.

"I won't say that I dislike snakes, ma'm—that is, in their place," said he, with becoming suavity. "And as far as snakes go, yours are beauties."

"You are most complimentary. *Presto, vamos!*" At a sudden gesture the serpents disappeared as mysteriously as they had appeared. "You perhaps wonder at me, senors?"

"I don't!" blurted out the sailor, who had again recovered his wind, so to speak. "Why, ma'm, you might turn your party self inside-out now, an' it wouldn't faze me!"

"I'm something of a professional woman," continued the senora, with increased suavity, "and I have my own reasons for making my home in such odd quarters. Would you, senors, like to look further?"

She opened a door invitingly, and they followed.

The saloon in which they had been sitting was at the extreme aft of the hulk, and she now conducted them forward through a succession of compartments and passages, the costly elegance of whose furniture and appointments was a continuous surprise.

At last she admitted them into a narrow passage, richly carpeted, and hung with crimson damask.

Here she paused at the curtained entrance, leaving them standing in the center of the floor, silently wondering what fresh revelation might be in store for them.

"Remain just as you are, or you will break the spell, senors," she cried, in a changed voice. "It is the hour, the fated hour!"

Gaff looked at her with gaping astonishment, Enesco with a swift suspicion.

Her countenance had also changed. It was frightful with a hushed, but concentrated fury; a smile of significant deadliness was frozen upon her lips; the splendor of her large, dilating eyes was instinct with a nameless ferocity; even her person seemed to enlarge and swell with an excess of malign purpose.

Lastly, a large yellow serpent, similar to the one that had escaped out of the coach—long, slender, golden-scaled—writhe silently into view from amid the upper drapery of her dark, cloud-like vesture, and ranged itself about her neck, bosom and arms in gleaming folds and festoons.

A strange spectacle, as fantastic as terrible! and strongly suggesting the line:

And lo, about her, fold on fold,
A golden serpent hung—
An eye of jet, a skin of gold,
A garnet for a tongue!

But Lamia-like as was the general effect, it was absorbed in a single instant by the horrified men, and they had no time to collect themselves before she stamped her foot.

It was a signal.

The damask hangings parted on either side, revealing two ruffians—Pedro and Jago—with cocked revolvers presented.

Both the detective and his companion were unarmed.

They were fairly beset, "covered" from head to foot, hemmed in!

The White Sibyl of Morona burst into a terrible laugh—a laugh so wild, so discordant, so baleful, in contrast with her theretofore mellifluous accents, that it might have rung forth out of the everlasting fire-crypts of the irredeemably lost.

She menacingly held out one of her shapely arms, twined by the golden snake, whose head was raised hissing.

"Dupes and fools!" she screamed, "did you hope to deceive me with your puerile masquerade? Down—down into the depths that give not back their dead!"

The detective sprang toward her, but it was too late.

She had stamped her foot again.

The floor suddenly opened, and the two men were instantly swallowed up from view.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A DAMP SURPRISE.

THEN the floor closed as suddenly over their heads, there was a splash, and the intended victims were floundering in deep water amid intense darkness.

"Be quick!" they heard the senora's voice

exclaim. "Secure their boat by which they came hither. Then be ready to shoot them dead should they dive out under the hulk!"

These words, dimly heard, were followed by the muffled sound of swiftly-retreating footsteps overhead.

"Did you mark that, Tom?" demanded the detective, who was keeping himself afloat with the ease of an expert swimmer.

"To be sure, sir; and may her pet snakes devour her!"

"Follow me, then! It's our only chance."

With that the detective, determining his position as well as was possible, dived down and somewhat to the left.

By good luck, he came up outside the hulk in the clear sunlight, and almost within arm's-length of where the boat, as yet undisturbed, was moored.

In another instant he had scrambled into her, pushed off, and seized the sculls.

Then to get possession of a revolver from his coat-pocket, lying between his feet, was the work of but another moment, and, as Pedro and Jago made their breathless appearance on the hulk's deck, pistol in hand, he had the pair of them covered almost before they could realize the new turn that had taken place in the murderous game.

"Hands up!" he shouted. "Make a single offensive movement, or budge but an inch, and you are dead men in swift succession!"

They obeyed, staring stupidly down at him; while the detective dared not shift his eyes, anxious as he was to know what had become of his companion.

But the latter had come to the surface of the water on the shore side, and was presently seen boarding the hulk from that quarter with the agility and stealthiness of a cat.

Gaff made a gesture, to signify that he comprehended the situation, and at once began to cross the deck, to take the two ruffians in the rear.

At that instant, however, the senorina bounded into view up the companionway.

Her serpent paraphernalia was not on exhibition now—save for the hideous, basilisk luster of her burning eyes.

Her black hair was streaming down her back, in her hand glittered the long dagger with which she had struck at the detective's heart through the coach-window.

But she did not see Gaff, her gaze being held solely by her own satellites and the action of the detective that rendered them petrified from the boat.

"Oafs! cowards!" she hissed, "you have then let him escape? My vengeance upon you!"

"But it wasn't our fault, senora," called back Pedro, though neither he nor his companion dared turn from the menacing revolver's muzzle to look at her. "He had dived under and grabbed the skiff before we could put in an appearance."

"Ay, laggards—snails! and only to hold you now paralyzed at his pistol's point. Ha, ha, ha! However, let him go, if but to meet one of the torpedoes with which my floating fastness is encircled. Strange that he escaped them in his first approach! Where is the scoundrel's fellow-spy?—food for fishes, let us hope!"

Here, with a piratical yell, Gaff crossed the deck in a couple of concluding bounds, hurling the two men head-over-heels into the water.

"Your sarvent, ma'm!" he shouted; "but where are them snakes?"

And with that he, also, had gone over the side head-first, and a moment later had resumed his sculls in the boat with the detective.

"Sheer off, and be careful!" muttered the latter, dropping his revolver to take up his pair of oars. "Remember her words about the torpedoes, though I only half take stock in them myself."

The senora now, with her calmness partly restored, was coolly surveying them from the side of the hulk, while her disheartened bravos were paddling about in the water, chattering like monkeys, and seeking in vain for some means of climbing up the slippery side.

"Adios, senors!" she called out in soft mockery. "Adios, Senor Ensco, more especially! When next we meet, it may be under more favorable circumstances!"

"Pay off there, Gaff, and give no further attention to her," directed the detective, in a low voice. "Look out, or we'll foul that mass of drift-wood. By jove! we have fouled it."

As the nose of the boat, under Gaff's flurried pulling, drove into the mass to be avoided, it must have given a critical jar to some deadly submerged apparatus on which the drift was grounded.

At all events, there was a dull, muffled explosion, and, as the fiendish woman's laugh rung out exultingly, the entire mass sprung high into the air on the crest of a sort of a water-spout.

"Give way!" cried the detective. "Pull for your life, Tom! We're uninjured as yet."

The keen boat shot out and away, luckily escaping the drift-wood shower in its descent, and a moment later was out of harm's way, though half-filled with water, and with its occupants drenched to the skin.

"By Jupiter!" growled Tom Gaff, pausing to

mop his brow and take breath; "it wasn't all gammon about them torpedoes, after all."

"It seems not," said Ensco, and he turned to make a mock gesture of farewell to the senorita, but she had disappeared from view.

"Good Lord, sir! but ain't she the terror?"

"She can hold her own pretty well in that line, I fancy."

"Is she human, think you, sir?"

"Something like it."

"A word now to the police, then, would bag the witch and her hull establishment, snakes included."

"Catch stroke!—Not yet awhile, at all events."

"Why not, sir?" demanded the sailor, while falling to work again.

"Hardly ripe yet."

"Now or never, I should say."

"Wrong! Barring the attempted abduction, there's not a ghost of proof against her as yet on the main issue."

Gaff looked dissatisfied.

"You mean in the murder case?" he asked.

"Yes."

"But ain't actin' like the devil, an' havin' red an' yaller snakes fur messmates, a capital crime?"

Ensco laughed.

"Not quite, Tom."

"Humph!"

"Besides, my man," the detective further vouchsafed, "we've already lost two hours, and we're not to forget to-night's work cut out for us. Strong as is the tide in our favor, I doubt if we shall make the Seamew in good season."

As it was, they reached the yacht a scant hour before dusk, and just as Mr. Wright Vanderlynn was also putting in an appearance over her side.

After resuming his own proper habiliments, the detective first gave that young gentleman an outline of the work in prospect.

Little Starlight was then sent off to act as Miss Delorme's escort, after which Mr. Dago—now the captain of the Seamew, though subject to the detective's orders in a general way—came into the cabin with his report of the preparations throughout the day.

These proved to be generally to Ensco's satisfaction, though not altogether so.

"You reconnoitered the Bowery Bay rendezvous afresh, I suppose?" he demanded.

"Yes, sir."

"With what effect?"

"To all appearance, they've not the slightest suspicion of our intentions. Mr. and Mrs. Emroled are of the same opinion."

"Good! They are in readiness to cooperate with us?"

"Yes."

"You told them of the likelihood of a visit from Miss Delorme?"

"They will expect her."

"How many men do the band mostly muster at the rendezvous?"

"As many as thirty."

Ensco turned with a smile to Vanderlynn.

"And we shall bring six to the attack, including yourself," said he.

The young gentleman stared, but then laughed.

"Odds enough to keep us busy!" he replied, with a yawning stretch of his clinched hands above his head. "Hard knocks and a lively time! That suits me to a T, my boy."

The detective again addressed himself to Mr. Dago.

"Now about the mysterious steam-launch," he went on. "What of her?"

"The yacht commander's face fell a little."

"Well, sir, she remains a mystery," he admitted.

"You tracked her?"

"Yes."

"But with no chance to slip aboard?"

"Not the ghost of one."

"What do you know about her?"

"Two things only. That she is piloted by Jim Farrish, a river-pirate and desperado from far back; and that she's now moored in a little cove just t'other side of Hallett's Point."

Ensco arose.

"I must investigate the steam-launch without delay," said he.

CHAPTER XIX.

IN THE SEAMEW'S CABIN.

VANDERLYNN had also sprung to his feet, and so suddenly as to attract the attention of the others.

His face also wore a startled look.

"What ails you?" asked Ensco.

"Oh, nothing—that is—well," and the young man laughed nervously, "to tell the truth, it just occurred to me, and all in a flash, that it was in this very cabin those ghastly murders took place."

"Of course. By the way, that very arm-chair you jumped out of—it has been newly upholstered since—was doubtless the one out of which old Captain Marston must have sprung to confront his midnight murderers."

Vanderlynn shuddered.

"This is unlike you, my boy," the detective continued. "You're not afraid?"

"Of nothing on earth to my knowledge. You ought to know that, Ensco."

"I do know it; and yet your sudden alarm?"

"I own I'm superstitious," said the young man, frankly. "Though insensible to earthly fear, as I firmly believe myself to be, I have an instinctive horror of the unearthly. I can't help it."

"Is there aught unearthly?"

"Why, don't you believe there is?"

"I am with Montaigne. I believe what I know, or what is knowable. And I repeat, is there anything not of the earth that we, being of the earth, can have any cognizance of?"

"I don't know, perhaps not."

Mr. Dago smiled.

"But all this has nothing to do with the cabin here," he interposed. "Yonder was where the poor old captain gave his last gasps to us. In that corner the poor steward, Mala, the Kanaka, lay dead; while just outside there was the body of brave Jack Hammond, the second officer."

Vanderlynn gave a slight, involuntary shudder.

"But there was nothing unearthly in all these tragic happenings," continued the first officer of the Seamew. "Indeed, they were essentially brutal, and of the earth earthy."

"Admittedly," said the young man, uneasily.

"Still, there's always a haunted feeling about a locality where murder has been done, especially when the murderer has not yet been brought to justice."

"Nonsense, young sir! No more than there should be about any other place—that is, if we look at it in a philosophical way."

"I agree with Mr. Dago," interposed the detective. "Besides, if the murders committed here are as yet unavenged, it is only a question of time when they will be."

"False! false! false!" at this instant rung out a thin, airy voice from nowhere in particular.

Vanderlynn, who had resumed his seat, sprung up as if he had been shot, while Dago and the detective looked surprised and troubled.

Then the first officer clinched his hand, and bounded up the companionway, muttering:

"Trickery somewhere! Let me but fix it upon the right man!"

Vanderlynn followed him.

The only one on deck was Jones, a stalwart young sailor, formerly one of the Seamew's trusted crew, and recently re-employed.

And he was sitting carelessly on the starboard gunwale, humming an air while watching the lights that were beginning to twinkle from the village opposite.

Questioned, he was sure that no stranger had approached the yacht's side, and Mr. Gaff, he was quite certain, was indulging in a nap in his berth.

When they re-entered the cabin it was to find that Ensco had lighted a lamp, by which he was preoccupied with some penciled memoranda.

"I was sure you would make no discovery," said he quietly.

"Why?" asked Vanderlynn.

"Because I recognized the voice as ventrilo-quial at once."

"Ventriloquial?"

"Yes."

Dago slapped his knee.

"But," continued the younger man, "you also looked startled and troubled, Ensco."

"True; for a new and unexpected difficulty for us was presented. Treason on shipboard, or else a fresh outside trickster not far away."

They reported their questioning of Jones.

"That merely deepens the mystery, and a mystery within a mystery is always a nuisance. Wheels within wheels. Come now, Dago, to return to the steam-launch. Why did you not try to slip aboard of her?"

"Farrish was in view all the time."

"You are acquainted with him?"

"Ay, sir; and he with me. There's the trouble."

"So."

"Yes, sir. And how could I have made overtures to him, without his taking the alarm?"

"True; but he doesn't know me. I shall have a closer look at that launch, as a preliminary, right away. Vanderlynn, suppose you accompany me."

"With all my heart!" Vanderlynn seemed rejoiced to get out of the Seamew's cabin, and stay out.

"You won't go now, sir?" queried the chief officer.

"Why not?" demanded the detective. "The reconnoiter can be made in a quarter of an hour."

"True, sir; but twilight is already falling, and you are expecting the young lady."

"I'll take Mingo, too. With him at the sculls we ought to be back in time. Come, Wright."

They took the yacht's boat, as being roomier than the borrowed club-shell, and were speedily afloat, with the gigantic negro at the oars.

He had just stepped on board from an errand into the village as they had made their appearance up the companionway.

"Don't forget that I'm to entertain the young lady, if she comes in your absence, sir!" called out Dago from the yacht.

Ensco nodded, and then the boat sheered away.

There was still plenty of light, and, as they shot rapidly toward Hallett's Point, the detective imparted to his young friend something of Miss Delorme's anticipated share in the night's undertaking.

Vanderlynn, naturally enough, was both surprised and interested.

"She must be a strange and a bold girl, that young lady," he commented.

"You have never seen her?"

And the detective eyed him narrowly, for, besides being a well-known man about town, Vanderlynn was good-looking, and could doubtless make himself agreeable.

"Never."

"Well, you are right in your guess. Inez Delorme is both strange and brave."

"I should say so. What part can she take in such an affair?"

"She will go on ahead by land, and interview the Emroleds, the odd couple I told you about."

"Alone?"

"No; little Starlight will accompany her."

"Ah, I remember the boy. Still, he is but a boy."

"One in a thousand."

"A boy is a boy."

"Doubtless you would like greatly to take her place?"

Vanderlynn laughed.

"I don't know about that. Miss Delorme is rich as every one knows. But is she likewise young—attractive?"

There was something reassuringly refreshing in both laugh and words.

"Rather," was the detective's dry reply.

"But, apart from all that," said Vanderlynn, earnestly, "is it exactly the sort of a thing for a young lady to engage in?"

"It is Miss Delorme's desire. Besides, Miss Delorme is not like other young ladies."

"Oh!"

Upon reaching the cove—a retired spot—in which the steam-launch lay, not a sign of life was observable on board.

They cautiously rowed around the graceful craft, but, beyond making out her name on the stern, could discover nothing of interest, save that she seemed wholly deserted, without even a sign of fire in her engine.

The name, however, was suggestive.

It was the Ghost.

"She's a beauty!" commented Vanderlynn, as they began to row back, for the twilight was deepening. "With a good head of steam on, she ought to slip through the water like a dolphin."

"And with the silence and stealthiness that her name implies," added the detective. "Do you recognize her?"

Vanderlynn shook his head, after a parting study of the symmetrical craft.

"No; she's new to these waters. I'm sure of that."

When midway back to the yacht, they came to a pause as the Astoria ferry-boat, her decks densely crowded fore and aft with home-returning work-people, was just rounding to as she approached her dock.

At this moment there was something like a scuffle at the edge of her forward deck, and a handsome lad, dressed or looking like a young Cuban, was precipitated headforemost into the river.

Vanderlynn had opportunely gripped him by the collar, and thus saved him from being carried under the wheel, when, amid the confusion that was incidentally taking place on the ferry-boat, little Starlight was seen continuing the scuffle, and apparently trying to spring at the throat of a big man, who was keeping him at arm's-length with some difficulty.

When the little fellow, however, saw that the lad overboard was out of danger, he relinquished his bellicose efforts.

"Look out, Rowlock—it's me!" he piped out.

With that he tossed a bundle down into the yacht's boat, and then followed it himself, alighting so airily, after climbing down and then swinging himself out, as to hardly cause a tremor in the craft.

Vanderlynn had by this time dragged the other lad on board, and, as the big ferry-boat swept on, with a chorus of cheers from her crowds, the yacht's boat tossed and plunged like a chip on her after-swells.

"What does this mean?" cried Ensco, turning angrily upon little Starlight. "Is this the way you obey my orders?"

The boy turned his cud and accomplished his characteristic speculation.

"Betcherlife, boss, an' live it out, too!" he replied.

"Where is the young lady?"

Starlight burst into a laugh, in which he was heartily joined by the rescued lad, who was by this time as thoroughly composed as the other, though naturally more or less moist.

"Oh, boss, but you do sometimes make me tired!" cried Starlight.

The silvery laugh of Inez had already unmasked her to the detective.

"I'm glad you brought away my bundle, Starlight," said she. "It contains my disguises, and a fresh one will be in order before long."

CHAPTER XX.

FRESH ADVENTURE.

It took Vanderlynn somewhat longer than Ensco to realize that the *pseudo*-young Cuban, whom he had dragged out of the water, was none other than Miss Delorme herself.

When he did so his astonishment was immense, if not altogether demonstrative, and she was not so much disguised but that he could perceive how attractive she was.

"Be quick, and wrap this around you!" exclaimed the detective, whipping off his jacket, and handing it to her. "You are dripping wet."

He was secretly not in the best of humor, and would much rather that he, in lieu of Vanderlynn, had saved her from the ferry-boat wheel.

Inez made a gesture of dissent, but, nevertheless, threw the jacket about her shoulders, after laughingly declining Vanderlynn's too ready assistance.

"The weather is so warm!" said she. "But for all that I shall be glad to be dry once more."

"Now for an explanation," said the detective, while Mingo, after a grunt at the odd nature of the detention, was again bending to his work.

Inez's brow became troubled.

"That big man on the ferry!" she exclaimed. "I am sure he jostled me overboard on purpose."

"You bet he did!" cried Starlight.

"You tell the story, Starlight."

The latter did so, though there wasn't much to tell.

After the mischance to Inez, Starlight had accused the big man in question of having purposely occasioned it, and had then attacked him with the result that has been seen.

"For the ferry-landing, quick, Mingo!" exclaimed Ensco, giving the tiller a twist. "We must intercept the rush of the crowd over the bridge. Now, Starlight, we've only three minutes. Describe the big man from head to foot, so that I cannot possibly mistake him."

The lad complied.

A moment later the yacht's boat was at the side of the dock, just as the ferry-boat effected her landing, with the usual rattle of chains, in the slip, and the passengers began to pour out over the bridge and through the ferry-house in a hurried stream.

But at the same instant the detective was out over the dock, like a shot.

He disappeared around the ferry-house, slipped through the rush like a fish through a network of waterflags, and when he reappeared in view of his party, the big man who had been described by the lad was struggling in his grasp.

Inez gave an anxious little cry, while Starlight fairly yelled with delight.

"He's nabbed him, Rowlock's nabbed him!" he cried. "But hallo, mister!" this to Vanderlynn; "help's wanted."

Yes; for at that instant the detective was seen to be suddenly beset by a dozen or more of fiercely-gesticulating foreign-looking men, who were intent upon rescuing his prisoner.

Followed by Starlight, Vanderlynn was out on the dock in an instant.

And then, if Tom Gaff had been on hand as a witness, his doubts as to the young New Yorker's fistic abilities in a general muss would have been quickly put to rest.

He was here, there and everywhere, a veritable prodigy of pugilism, four men biting the dust under his lightning-like shoulder-biting in such rapid succession as to give the impression that they were little more than men of wood.

But the odds were too great.

Ensco had in the mean time, held on to his prisoner with one hand, while effectively striking out right and left with the other, and little Starlight had heroically upset a man darting between his legs, but the assailants suddenly organized a simultaneous rush, and then all was over.

When the detective and his assistants emerged from the *hors du combat*, in which they had been temporarily placed, the enemy had all disappeared in the dusk, and nothing was to be confronted but a policeman or two and a throng of excited onlookers.

Mingo, whose added energy might have turned the scale of the contest, had tarried behind to make fast the boat, and was consequently on hand too late to be of any assistance.

"I almost had the fellow," regretfully muttered the detective, on the way to the yacht.

"However, I shall know him again."

"Did you recognize him as belonging to the band?" asked Inez, in a low voice.

He shook his head.

No sooner was the deck of the Seamew reached than she snatched her bundle and disappeared.

But when Ensco and Vanderlynn entered the cabin-saloon, a few minutes later, she reappeared from the after compartment in her own character, her costume being an admirably-fitting walking-suit of serviceable material.

Vanderlynn was so struck by the girl's beauty that he could only look and remain silent, which, however, was sufficiently impressive.

The detective on his part, surveyed her with surprise.

"You know that expedition is about to start?" he queried.

"I do know it, comrade."

"You will not go in disguise?"

"To what good?"

"But even I did not see through your last one until you spoke, after being dragged out of the water."

"But the big man, on the ferry-boat, who pushed me overboard?"

Rowlock Ensco knitted his brows.

"True; he must have penetrated it—or some one else for him."

"Probably the latter."

"Did you mark any one observing you?"

"Yes; a tall woman, closely veiled."

"Aha!"

"Little Starlight had just called my attention to her, in a whisper, when the push or scuffle occurred in which I lost my balance."

"That doubtless explains it."

"At all events, I shall enact my part just as I am. Or, in case of great need, I have another disguise—in fact, more than one—with me."

And she made a movement with the bundle, which she still carried in one hand.

Ensco stepped to the door.

"Starlight!"

The boy appeared.

"You have your instructions. Miss Delorme is ready."

Inez stepped forward with unquestioning self-reliance.

"One moment!" continued the detective, with a swift, anxious look.

"Well, Rowlock?"

"I know from the past that neither the senior nor the twins are desirous of working you personal harm."

"Well?"

"Otherwise, you should not go."

Inez laughed, perhaps to conceal the loving look she was giving him.

"Excuse me, my friend," she said, "but, having once made up my mind, I *would* go under any circumstances."

"You would?"

"Ay, indeed, Ensco. I am armed, and the wheels of my destiny shall never roll backward. Adios, amigo!"

And, motioning the boy to precede her, she sprung after him up the companionway.

The detective restrained a movement to follow and bring her back.

Then was heard the splash of oars, indicating that the young girl was on her way to the shore.

But Wright Vanderlynn had restrained his open objections to the mission of Inez with even greater difficulty than Ensco had felt.

"It isn't right!" he burst out.

"What isn't?" said the detective, with the utmost coolness.

"Can you ask? Why, the departure of Miss Delorme on such an errand. It is outrageous!"

"Indeed! If you were her escort, it would doubtless be more highly proper."

The young man flushed, but he retained his composure.

"It would certainly be less dangerous for her, Ensco. But you wrong me by those words."

"I would not wrong you."

"Confess that there is danger!"

"To her, or for her?"

"Yes."

"No, I shall not. But, admitting that there is, what of that if she *will* go, and I do not absolutely forbid?"

"You!"

"Yes, I."

"What do you mean?"

"That Inez Delorme is my betrothed."

Vanderlynn's manner instantly changed.

"Good Heavens! forgive me," he exclaimed. "I did not dream—"

"Of course not, so say no more on the subject."

"Still, are you so sure that our chief enemies would do the young lady no personal harm?"

"Certainly; or she should not have quitted the yacht."

"But that veiled woman on the ferry-boat, and Miss Delorme's misadventure there?"

"I have thought this thing all out, Vanderlynn. There was some misunderstanding between that woman and her agent; or, at all events, if that woman was our chief enemy, as I suppose, it was not by her design that Inez was thrown overboard. Come on deck."

When they reached the deck the Seamew was already under way, heading up-stream, with a light but favorable wind.

The expedition against the fastness of the river-pirates was at last fully on foot.

CHAPTER XXI.

A MYSTERIOUS COUPLE.

DIRECTLY on being placed ashore from the yacht, Inez and her little companion boarded a horse-car for the Bowery Bay Beach, three miles distant, which had only come into vogue the preceding year as a transient summer resort.

"I'll show yer jest when an' where to get out, miss," whispered little Starlight, with a highly

responsible, proprietary air. "You're to take your cue from me."

He rolled his everlasting quid from one cheek to the other, but deferentially expectorated from behind his hand.

Inez had come to like the little fellow, no less than to trust him, and she struggled to hide the amused look that was in her eyes and lips.

"Thank you, Starlight," said she. "I shall not forget that you are my counselor and guide."

"More special," he continued, "if any cuss should hop aboard here, an' attempt to gun you, you're to leave it all to me."

"To gun me!"

"Don'tchersee? To mash yer, you know."

"Oh!" And this time she burst out laughing.

But, Bowery Bay Beach being rather a day than evening resort, there were but few other passengers, and those of a kind apparently little given to gunning or mashing in the sense implied.

When within half a mile of the hotel the pair alighted from the car, and Starlight led the way by striking off into a woodland path that was all but invisible, for the night was cloudy at best.

"This 'ere footpath, miss," the boy exclaimed, "cuts off the swell beach grounds, an' takes us around Bowery Bay Point."

"It is a good thing that you seem to know the way so well," said Inez, courageously keeping at his heels in the little less than solid darkness.

"I oughter, miss. I've knowed it from my fu'st an' earliest youth."

"Oh, dear! and how old are you now, Starlight?"

"Fourteen." And she heard him expectorate with impressive solemnity.

"Bless me! what a retrospect is yours! And have you also chewed tobacco from those remote days?"

His sigh sounded somewhat *blase* in the stillness of the deep wood, broken solely by their rustling footfalls.

"No, Miss Delorme; it's a vice of my later years. Please don't call me a brute, miss."

"By no means—the idea!"

"Besides, I know it to be a beastly habit. I'm knocking off, as it is—sort of tapering down the practice."

"That is good!"

"Yes; I only chew two papers of fine-cut a day now."

"Astonishing! This path leads us directly to the Emroled cottage?"

"Straighter'n a dead shot!"

They presently emerged from the wood, and found themselves near a small cabin, that was perched upon a considerable eminence close to the water's edge.

It overlooked a wide expanse of lonesome water, dotted here and there with islands, all lying peacefully in a soft, opalescent light that shone from the fleecy clouds, although there was no moon.

Inez paused at the top of the eminence, and looked around.

"No sign of the Seamew yet!"

"It ain't time for her," said the boy. "Look!" and he pointed away. "Do yer twig that sort of tumble-down lookin' chebang among the rocks yonder, half a mile away?"

"I don't know. What is a chebang?"

"Crib, ranch, roost, den, buildin'—why, house!"

"Oh! yes, now I see—that ruinous affair at the mouth of a sort of creek, isn't it?"

"Dat's de cheese, miss."

"Well, what of it?"

"It's the pirates' chebang!" explained Starlight, in a hoarse whisper.

"What! the place to be surrounded and attacked to-night?"

He nodded.

Here the door of the cabin opened, and a woman appeared—a still young-looking, but strange and care-worn figure, framed in the outpouring lamplight.

"I thought I heard voices," she said, in a strangely hushed, timid voice. "Is it Miss Delorme?"

"Yes," said Inez, stepping forward, while Starlight, with a cry of, "Mammy! mammy!" rushed before her, like a little child, and threw his arms around the woman's person. "I was expected, then?"

"Oh, yes, miss; for some days, from what Mr. Ensco said. Step in, please; Mr. Emroled will be here presently."

And Mrs. Emroled, while fondling the boy tenderly, never took her eyes off the young woman's face as she ushered her into the cabin.

Inez was making good use of her own eyes, in her turn.

In Mrs. Emroled she saw a much-broken woman of thirty-six or eight, with an abundance of snow-white hair, and the traces of great beauty.

But there was a mysterious shifting expression of the worn face and hollow eyes—apart from the latter's steadfast regard at the present moment—that both mystified and startled the gazer.

"He is very fond of you, and you of him," said Inez, smiling at Starlight's demonstrations.

Mrs. Emroled smiled in return, but it was the saddest smile imaginable.

"Yes," and she absently patted the little fellow's cheek. "Little Starlight was a baby when he first came into our care. Mr. Ensco's taking him away and making a little man of him hasn't made any difference in his affection for us—God be praised!" this last with a wild sort of fervor.

"Have you always called him Starlight?"

"No; Mr. Ensco gave him that name. I suppose it was because of the wonderful starriness of the night when he rescued him from drowning out yonder in the bay." And the woman's arms instinctively closed more tightly round the boy.

"But that was three or four years ago."

"Four last month, mammy!" chirped up the little fellow. "I'd been upset when out clammin'. Lordy! but wasn't the water cold?"

"He was only little Jimmy before that," said Mrs. Emroled, softly; and from an inaudible motion of her lips Inez inferred that "Jimmy" had been a poor foundling.

"Then you have had no children of your own, I presume?" inquired the young girl, gently.

The effect of the question was so painful that she heartily wished that she had not asked it.

"What? I? Oh, no!—that is— Oh, how terrible! the idea!"

The poor woman was so unaccountably overwhelmed that the entrance of her husband was no less a relief to herself than to her visitor.

"George, this is Miss Delorme."

He cast a lightning-like glance of startled curiosity—or so it seemed to Inez—at the young lady, and then, with a surly attempt at courtesy, went to deposit some fishing-nets that he was carrying in the chimney-corner.

"What a very singular couple!" thought Inez, to herself, and she had to confess that Mr. Emroled was more singular-looking than even the wife.

He could have been but little over forty, yet his spare, vigorous figure was partly stooped, as with years; they were doubtless handsome features which his straggling iron-gray beard rendered unkempt and ill-looking; and there was the same shifting, unsatisfied—one might say, absolutely hopeless and despairing—expression in the eyes that distinguished the woman's, only in his there was the addition of a savage, resentful suggestion that was wanting in hers.

After that first look at the young girl, however, he seemed to avoid turning his eyes upon her face.

He had seated himself morosely upon a stool. "The Seamew has just rounded the point," said he, after a long pause.

"That's the talk, daddy!" cried Starlight, looking up from his kneeling position in Mrs. Emroled's lap. "Now what are you goin' ter do? Here we are on hand, as you see."

"That's just it, Starlight," the man went on, in a complaining tone. "I'll help close the back passage of the boat-house, against the river-hounds' escape, just as I promised Mr. Ensco to do. It's a risky job, but I reckon you and I might manage it. But what to do with this young lady, save to leave her here to tremble along with your mammy, I don't know."

Inez made a determined movement.

"That you will certainly not do with me, sir!" she said, quietly. "I am here to be of use—to share the danger, if necessary—not to tremble uselessly in any one's company. I have a brave spirit, I am armed"—she coolly produced her revolver—"I demand to be at the front!"

Mrs. Emroled whitened a little, while her husband distrustfully eyed the young girl's skirts.

"Those would be in the way," he growled, indicating them with an impatient gesture.

"It's a rough and briery way to the cave-passage to the river pirates' water-fort."

"Is that all? Wait!" Rising, she perceived a communicating door. "You will permit me the use of that inner room a moment?" This to the woman, who wonderingly inclined her head.

"Thank you. I shall be back in a moment."

Then she disappeared with her bundle.

When she reappeared, it was as a very charming, but none the less capable-looking, sailor lad.

"Is this any improvement?" she asked, demurely; while little Starlight set up a sort of approving hurrah.

"Humph!"

That was Emroled's sole comment, and he at once began making ready for the expedition by putting on his hat, lighting a dark lantern, and tucking under his arm a long, heavy cudgel.

Inez was the last of the trio to step over the threshold.

As she was doing so, much to her astonishment, Mrs. Emroled caught her in her arms.

"You must not go!" cried the woman, wildly. "There is danger—perhaps unsuspected horror! I cannot let you— Oh, my child, my darling, my beloved! you must not go."

Fearing that the woman was beside herself, the young girl hastily disengaged the straining arms, though not without a considerable exertion of strength.

"Madam, you forget yourself," said she, haughtily. "I cannot account for your extraordinary conduct."

But the woman, who seemed half frantic

with fear, again seized her, and this time imprinted kiss after kiss upon the lovely face.

"I sha'n't let you go!" she wailed. "My God; if anything should befall you!"

"Thanks, that is my own concern. Madam, at another time you shall explain yourself!"

And, again tearing herself free, the *pseudo* sailor-lad had sprung out into the night.

Strange Mrs. Emroled sunk back with a sort of wail, supporting herself by the back of a chair.

Suddenly, however, she uttered a little cry of relief.

Inez had returned so quickly that it hardly seemed she had been gone.

She was no longer angry, but with a troubled, penitent look in her sweet face.

"I don't know why it is, ma'm," said she very gently, "but I am sorry I repelled you so rudely. I—I was never kissed just that way before, and—would you mind doing it just once more?"

The woman caught her to her breast, and kissed her again and again—hungrily and desperately, Inez thought.

Then she would have continued her entreaties, but the young girl would not listen to them.

Again she broke away, and this time did not pause till she had joined Emroled and Starlight, who were awaiting her at the foot of the hill.

As for the lonely, hollow-eyed woman in the house, she had sunk into a seat, and there was now a sort of ecstasy in her face.

"She came back," she murmured, "of her own will she came back, and she kissed me! God be thankful for that, if for never anything more!"

And, sinking down upon her knees before the chair, her trembling hands were joined together, and she prayed in silence.

CHAPTER XXII.

HOLDING THE FORT.

BEFORE the trio of adventure seekers turned their backs upon the water to strike off into a wooded path that crept off from the foot of the hill, they saw the Seamew come into view from around the point, making a very pretty picture as her dark sail caught the gentle wind, of which there was just enough to belly it out smoothly.

"There are not many prettier single-stickers in the world than the Seamew, to my mind," said Inez, as they struck into the path. "I am glad she is my property."

"You ought to be," observed Emroled, curtly.

"A beautiful boat!"

"She's a screamer!" cried Starlight, enthusiastically. "Oh, if you'd only belong to a club, Miss Delorme, how the Seamew would paralyze 'em!"

"Not so loud," cautioned Emroled, who was leading, with an occasional gleam from his lantern. "We are approaching the enemy's country."

"There is one thing I can't understand, sir," said Inez, in an obediently guarded voice, after a pause.

"What may that be?"

"How Ensco can hope to take the band by surprise in the Seamew, which is so well known to river men, and on such a night as this, which is by no means a very dark one."

"Ensco is no man's fool."

"I am aware of that."

"But his game is especially deep in acting just as he does."

"That is what I am seeking information about."

"Well, it is just because the yacht is so well known, and is so often seen cruising hereabouts, night and day, that he knows he can count on exciting no suspicion with her."

"Oh!"

"Whereas, if he'd come slipping along in open boats, with all his force plainly visible, it would be a dead give-away from the start."

"Thank you. I understand better now."

"You're welcome, young sailor chap."

"Would you mind," asked Inez, after another pause, "letting me know more particularly what sort of co-operation is expected of us?"

"It's this way: The old stone boat-house, in which the gang meet to divide their river plunder and hatch fresh deviltry, has but two entrances, and consequently but two modes of egress."

"Yes." And at the same time Inez wondered not a little at the other's fair choice of language, considering him a simple East river fisherman.

"The chief of these is by water," continued Emroled, "and thereabouts, at the mouth of the creek, the gang keep moored such of their boats as are too big to be pulled in under the boat-house after them. For you must bear in mind that the greater part is built out over the water."

"I understand."

"Well, it is by that point that Ensco will make his attack, in the hope of bagging the chief game that he is after."

"Yes."

"To enable him to do that, we must block the only avenue of escape by land. This is a cave passage, communicating with the back of the

boat-house, the entrance of which is about thirty yards distant from it."

"Ah!"

"This passage is seldom made use of by the thieves, being only relied on for an unexpected emergency."

"Well?"

"Well," dryly, "it will be a good thing for us if to-night's emergency shall be as unexpected as possible."

"What else, please?"

"Well, we're to hold or block the passage, while Ensco sails in on the scoundrels with his crowd. A rocket from him is to signal us that he has smashed in their boats and cut off escape by water. Then we send up a rocket, to let him know that we have the back door shut. Then the scrimmage, if there is any, begins."

"Thank you, Mr. Emroled. How many men do the pirates muster, think you?"

"From twenty to thirty; to-night about thirty, I fancy—a full quorum, you might say."

"And does Mr. Ensco hope to capture all those ruffians with the few men at his command?"

"Perhaps not; most likely the majority will be laid out or make their escape somehow."

"But isn't there something foolhardy in such an attack, think you?"

"Well," said Mr. Emroled, evasively, "Mr. Ensco just won't call in the help of the regular police. That's the long and short of it, young sailor chap."

Inez began to like Mr. Emroled better than at first.

It was some time before she spoke again, but she did so at last, and more guardedly than before.

"Mr. Emroled?"

"Yes."

"You must be well known, personally, to the river pirates, sir."

"Better than I like to be."

"And they have not molested you, I suppose?"

"No; river thieves aren't often stealing old fish-nets and the like."

"But do you not dread a reprisal from them, after thus assisting in their capture?"

Mr. Emroled coughed reflectively.

"Young sailor chap, George Emroled, though he mayn't exactly look it, has got a knack of taking care of his own skin—on occasion."

This was said in a manner to close the colloquy.

They had been traversing much broken country, with at times the bay in sight, but mostly with rough woods as their surroundings.

Emroled at last held up his hand, as a sign that the utmost caution must be observed.

They at last arrived at the sought-for passage-entrance.

This Emroled and Starlight proceeded to block up as well as they were able by rolling great stones and stacking brushwood into the entrance.

Inez was posted on a little eminence to one side as a sentry, a post which she held, revolver in hand, and with a fast-beating heart.

It was a most unusual duty for a delicately-nurtured young lady to fill, but the excitement called up a lively glow in her veins, and she was not ashamed to confess to herself that she found it to her liking—so far, at least.

From her slightly elevated lookout, she could see the back of the ruinous boat-house—originally a rather extensive structure—and, just beyond, a strip of placid water where the creek came into the river.

There was not a glimmer of light for the house, but an occasional indistinct murmur of voices.

Presently the Seamaw rounded like a beautiful vision into view, her great sail still flowing gently.

A moment later she was hidden by a long line of trees stretching out from the water-front.

Inez stepped back to where her companions were at work.

They had succeeded in blocking the cave-entrance so that but a narrow space for egress remained, and now stood in readiness, Emroled with his cudgel handy, Starlight seated on a rock, and complacently holding a cocked revolver that looked almost as big as himself.

Inez whispered that the yacht had entered the cove.

"All right!" replied Emroled. "Keep your lookout, young sailor-chap. We're ready when they are."

Inez stepped back to her post of observation, which was but a dozen yards away, with a thicket as her near background.

A few minutes later there was a rocket from the water-space just beyond the boat-house.

Emroled instantly responded with one from his position.

Then there suddenly broke upon the night a pandemonium of shouts, yells and curses from the boat-house, as a sufficient indication that the river-pirates were surprised and attacked in their chosen lair.

At first the young girl's heart stood still, then it leaped, while the blood coursed tumultuously in her veins.

"Heaven be with our cause!" she murmured.

"Oh, if both Juan and Vasco be only taken! Oh, if I could only do something!"

The tumult on the water-front, mingled with occasional shots, continued.

Then there was a crashing sound from the passage-entrance, together with some angry cries, that were muffled, as if coming from underground.

Inez felt her blood to be on fire.

She could not resist the temptation to step back and look.

A motionless figure lay at the narrow opening, just stretched out there by a blow from Emroled's bludgeon, curses and oaths were being hurled from the interior, and little Starlight was executing a sort of pigmy war-dance, pistol in hand.

Emroled sternly motioned her away.

"Back to your lookout!" he exclaimed. "It is most important, and be on your guard. Look on every side of you at once, if that is possible."

Inez obeyed.

But, on returning to her post, her eyes were unfortunately only to the front, with no attention to the thicket in her rear.

Suddenly and unawares, from this thicket there crept forth a form, and from this form there was outstretched a pair of hands and arms.

Inez felt like the blooded racer that is ignobly stalled and haltered within sound of the momentous contest in which he cannot share.

Her nostrils quivered, her hand tightened upon the revolver.

"Oh, if I could only do something!" she repeated to herself. "There must be something that I can effect!"

Useless heroics.

And that instant she was helpless in the grasp of that pair of hands and arms—helpless and voiceless.

Her struggles were as vain as those of the woodland fawn in the boar-constructor's folds.

The weapon was torn from her hand.

The dark form, with the *psuedo* sailor youth in its grasp, stepped back into the thicket, without a sound.

Inez had been eliminated from the scene as effectually as if the earth had swallowed her up.

In the mean time Emroled and the boy were having their hands full in defending the passage.

Two other motionless figures were stretched at the mouth of the cave entrance—one from a pistol-shot, the other by a bludgeon-blow—and still were the most fearful oaths and threats poured out from the crowd of desperate and entrapped men of the deep interior.

But the place was intact, no damage was done by the shots now and then fired out of the cave, another rush was not attempted from within, and Emroled, the mysterious Emroled, felt himself the master of the situation.

Presently, however, a shot came, not from within, but from without, and a bullet sung unpleasantly near his head.

"What can this mean?" said he. "Step over to the young lady's post, Starlight, and see what she is up to. Perhaps that was only a random shot from her pistol."

In a moment Starlight returned with the ominous report of the young girl's disappearance.

Simultaneous with this, there were more shots from without, and then two men suddenly sprung upon the passage-defenders from the bosom of the thicket behind.

The boy went down under a crack on the head, but not before his pistol had spoken again with some effect.

Then Emroled was beset by the two assailants, while a fresh one darted out upon him from the cave mouth.

He made a desperate fight to redeem the situation.

But none the less was the breach made at last—the subterranean passage in the hands of the besieged.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE RIVER PIRATES AT BAY.

As the Seamaw rounded into the cove to make the attack, Ensco and his men kept crouched under the bulwarks.

Mr. Dago, at the wheel, was the only man in sight to any jealous or suspicious eyes that might have questioned the apparent peacefulness of the yacht's mission from the shore.

"So far all is well," whispered the detective to Vanderlynn, who was crouching at his elbow. "Look away, and say how many boats you can make out at the mouth of the creek."

Vanderlynn leveled his night-glass over the rail.

"There are four," he replied, after a pause. "A small single-sticker and three light yawls."

"That is well," and Ensco rubbed his hands. "I doubt if they have taken any boats in under the arch, at all."

"We'll have 'em dead, eh?"

"It looks like it. If we can only stave in those bottoms without detection, we are all right."

"You are sure that the underground passage will likewise be blocked?"

"Quite sure, if Emroled has obeyed my instructions to the letter."

"And the young lady?"

"Don't fret about her. Mrs. Emroled will have kept her back in the cabin out of harm's way."

"I wish we could be dead certain of that," said Vanderlynn, doubtfully.

"Drop it, I tell you!"

"All right."

"The creek is deep, though narrow. Bring your glass to bear again. I want to be sure that the boats in view are all those to be disabled."

Vanderlynn again leveled the glass.

"There's nothing up the creek," he began. "Nothing that I can see. Hold on! By Jupiter! yes there is."

"What do you make out?"

"Look for yourself!"

At that instant the mysterious steam-launch came slipping out of the creek, silent as a ghost, swift as if winged by invisible pinions.

Ensco stared, and there was not a man on the yacht but felt more or less awed.

The launch had been missing from the cove in which Ensco and Vanderlynn had reconnoitered her at dusk, much to the mystification of the yacht's occupants in slipping up the river on this momentous expedition, but not a soul on board had dreamed of meeting her under the present circumstances, when her appearance was doubly ominous, to say the least.

Ensco gritted his teeth.

"If we might only settle with her first!" he muttered.

"Couldn't we manage to board her?" whispered Vanderlynn.

"Impossible! Look!"

Dark, throbbing, without a pulsation and with scarcely a streak of foam in her wake, she was shooting past like an arrow.

"There's but one figure on deck," whispered Vanderlynn again. "What! is it a woman?"

"Like enough."

The phantom launch—the Ghost, as she was most aptly named—was hardly studied well before she was gone.

She actually seemed to melt away into the shadow of the shore, without being seen to round the point at all, by which the Seamew had entered the cove.

Ensco drew a long breath.

"The suspicions of the gang have not been aroused," said he, as the voices from the interior of the boat-house were now distinctly heard. "That is the main point."

He signaled Mr. Dago, who gave the necessary order, and the sail was silently lowered, leaving the Seamew lying broadside before the water-arch under the boat-house.

Then Tom Gaff, to whom was deputed the task of disabling the outlying boats, tumbled over the side into the small boat, followed by Mingo and Jones, and provided with augers.

A few minutes later they signaled that the work was accomplished.

Instantly the detective sent off the rocket as a signal to Emroled.

It was answered almost on the instant.

Then a tremendous shout burst from every throat in the attacking party, there was a hub-bub of confusion inside the boat-house, with every other indication that the surprise was complete.

A dozen or more heads came peeking out from along the narrow footpaths underneath the water-arch, accompanied by the glistening of arms.

But the Seamew blocked the entrance, broadside on, and the small boat, with its three armed men, and Mingo towering head and shoulders over his companions, began to move in under the arch.

"Surrender!" called out the detective in his ringing voice. "Criminals! we have got you dead. Surrender at discretion!"

"You be hanged!" yelled a voice in response.

Then a broad, flat-bottomed boat, crammed with infuriated armed desperadoes, with Juan and Vasco at either end, darted out from under the arch, there was a series of sharp reports, and the battle was begun.

There were thirty robbers of them, in all, and, considering the disparity of numbers, it was not such a rash attempt, after all, this effort to board the yacht, and fight their way out.

But it was none the less unsuccessful.

Ensco, Vanderlynn and Dago began to pour shots into them from the Seamew's deck, while, on the part of the small boat, Gaff and Jones peppered away without ceremony, leaving the giant Mingo ample room for the sweep of an immense capstan bar, with which, standing upright, with one foot on the low gunwale, he swept the bravo-lined starboard guard of the barge like a besom of destruction.

Juan Martez, it is true—dagger between teeth and revolver in hand—succeeded in getting half over on the Seamew's deck.

But a shoulder-hitting blow in the gullet, from Vanderlynn's trained right hand, sent him flying and writhing back into the bottom of the barge, and not one of his followers had succeeded in following his lead.

Then at this juncture Mr. Dago unlimbered

and brought to bear the yacht's brass signal gun, which had been loaded with old nails and scrap-iron for just such an emergency.

Ensco was still busy with his revolver, so Vanderlynn found opportunity to lend a hand in steadying the little cannon, and depressing the muzzle over the bulwark for the necessary range.

"Look out below there!" roared the first officer, in mercy to the pirates. "We would sooner capture than kill."

And then the gun was discharged, tearing a hole, literally big enough to run a wheelbarrow through, in the bottom of the doomed barge.

There followed a chorus of despairing yells, and the robbers that were able sprung for the side-paths leading in under the arch.

"After them!" shouted Ensco. "The rear passage is secured. Give 'em no time to breathe!"

He leaped into the club-boat, followed by Vanderlynn, while Mr. Dago was alone left to look after the yacht.

Then, although the sunken barge almost blocked up the water-way, both boats pushed in until a foothold was gained for the occupants on the side-paths.

Ensco was the first to bound into the large interior, closely followed by Vanderlynn.

The woodwork of the sort of amphitheater surrounding the inside boat-landing was already ablaze from an incendiary torch, and apparently the last of the gang was disappearing into a gloomy doorway far back in the rear.

"Mingo, Gaff, Jones!" ordered the detective; "quick, off with you around to the cave opening I told you of, or Emroled and Starlight may be overpowered! Follow me, Vanderlynn!"

The three men addressed had disappeared back under the arch, in obedience to the order, and the detective was darting toward the door, when there was a yell of warning.

It was from Vanderlynn.

"Look out!" he cried. "Danger at hand!"

And his own cheek was grazed by a pistol-ball fired by Vasco Martez, who at that instant rose from behind one of the broken benches, his handsome dark face gleam-lit by the conflagration, the dare-devil laugh on his fearless lips.

Vanderlynn snapped a revolver at him in return, but it missed fire.

Casting the useless weapon aside with a muttered oath, he sprang at the Honduran youth with the clinched natural weapons that he used so well.

But Vasco was in under his guard like a flash, with his own hands hooked like claws.

"All right!" growled the New Yorker; "have it rough-and-tumble, if you insist on it."

The next instant they had grappled, stumbled, and plunged splashing into the inner horse-shoe of water, which was very deep, for the tide was at flood.

In the mean time, Ensco had turned at his friend's warning yell, but only in time to receive a blow on the head with a blazing brand in the hand of Juan Martez, who had sprung into view no less unexpectedly than his twin brother.

In Juan's other hand was a cocked revolver.

"Sleuth-hound of a detective!" he hoarsely ejaculated; "serpent doomed athlete! the fiery arrow smites thee from out the cloud at last!"

His eyes were ablaze with maniacal rage, and his face was perfectly bloodless, save for the birthmark arrow on his left cheek, where it seemed to be defined in dazzlingly red outline.

But the detective had staggered back under the blow from the brand, was still reeling waveringly, in fact, and to this he owed his immunity from the pistol-shot that accompanied the youthful desperado's allusion to the tattooed emblem.

As a matter of fact, and by a most wonderful coincidence, the bullet completely ripped up the sleeve of his right arm to the shoulder, thus revealing the mystic emblem in the fierce blaze of the burning room.

Juan started back in momentary suspicious dread.

"An omen!" he gasped. "*Por Dios!* an omen!"

This gave the detective time to recover his wonted energies.

"Murderer of Grant Marston! assassin of sleeping men! purloiner of the jewel-chest!" he exclaimed, in a terrible voice; "but it is for the scaffold, the hangman's cord, that I reserve thee!"

With that his own revolver spoke out exultantly.

It was that favorite shot of his, and the young bravo's pistol, shattered at the shock, flew out of his hand.

The next instant he was wreathed in the detective's anaconda grip.

But just then an unlooked-for incident favored the Honduran, whose doom might otherwise have been sealed.

Tom Gaff burst into view by the passage door, in a state of excitement that took in nothing of the situation in the blazing apartment.

"All's up!" he roared. "They've escaped—

Emroled and the kid done for—and the young lady dead or carried off!"

As Ensco's grasp on his foe instinctively relaxed at this terrible intelligence, Juan managed to tear himself free.

With a wild laugh, he took a header into the water, diving out in the direction of the arch-entrance.

And at this moment Vasco and Vanderlynn arose, partly separated, from their sub-aqueous struggle.

The former, who had just caught a glimpse of Juan's disappearing form, lost no time in following in his wake, and the next instant had dived out of sight.

Ensco uttered a few words of explanation, and then darted away through the arch, followed by Gaff and Vanderlynn, who had by that time climbed out of the water.

"The yacht first!" shouted the detective, as he ran. "Remember Dago is there alone."

But the yacht and Dago were found to be intact!

"Miss Delorme is gone—perhaps murdered!" then faltered the detective.

"Not so!" cried Mr. Dago, pointing solemnly with his hand. "Look!"

The phantom steam-launch was again noiselessly sweeping by.

Of the two female figures in view on her deck, one was Inez Delorme!

CHAPTER XXIV.

AFTER THE FIGHT.

THERE was no escaping this terrible revelation.

The slighter of the two female figures on the deck of the Ghost was a helpless captive in the other's grasp.

As the phantom launch sped by on her noiseless course, the faces of both were turned toward the yacht, and both were distinctly visible in the spectral opalescent light.

One was mute, pale, beautiful and despairing—the face of Inez Delorme.

The other was calm, bloodless, majestic, exultant—also beautiful, but with the sinister splendor of the fallen angels—the face of the Senora Zarapatta Martez, the White Sibyl of Morona, and mother of the demon twins.

The young girl's lips parted, as if to make an appealing cry.

Before it could be uttered she was slowly, irresistibly folded away into the somber-garmented bosom of her captor.

Silence, but not altogether inaction, had reigned on the yacht.

Ghastly pale with suppressed emotion, Rowlock Ensco had leveled his revolver at the senora.

But, unerring marksman as he was, he yet dared not risk a shot at that evil breast, which had become partly shielded by the inert, passive form of the girl he loved.

His hand fell to his side, and he gave an audible groan.

Then the phantom steam-launch had slipped past.

Headed for the open river, she swept out with her noiseless, fateful speed, and an intervening island quickly hid her from view.

"Nothing can be done at present," muttered the detective.

Here Mingo and Jones made their appearance, carrying between them the insensible form of little Starlight, who had been stricken down by a blow on the head.

"What is your report?" demanded Ensco, turning to Mingo, after the boy had been carried below.

It was simply to the effect that the fugitive robbers had just succeeded in making their escape by the cave-passage, after disposing of Emroled and the boy, as the three men from the attacking party put in an appearance at that point.

The fugitives had taken to the thick woods, rendering pursuit impracticable.

Emroled had also been overpowered and stricken down, but had been able, in spite of severe injuries, to go off without assistance in the direction of his cabin.

Then Ensco spoke.

"My friends," said he, "our expedition, so far as its chief objects are concerned, has ended in grief and failure, and that is all there is to be said. Captain Dago, have Starlight's injuries attended to, and then take such prisoners on board as are lying wounded or disabled on the sunken barge and elsewhere. Then be prepared to start for Hunt's Point on the Harlem, without delay. I shall be with you again at the earliest moment. Vanderlynn, I wish you would go with me to the Emroled Cottage. We must first investigate the particulars as to Miss Delorme's misfortune."

But very little was to be learned at the cabin upon this deeply interesting point.

Mrs. Emroled could only tell of her ineffectual attempts to dissuade Inez from attending her husband and little Starlight on the expedition that had ended so disastrously.

Mr. Emroled, who was beaten black and blue, besides suffering from some severe contusions of the head, could only tell how he had posted the young girl on lookout duty, as taking her some-

what out of the most imminent danger, and of her unaccountable disappearance therefrom.

"But for the young lady's unmistakable courage," said he, "I should have said that she had voluntarily deserted her post through fright."

"She must have been surprised, and carried off," said the detective. "She is now a prisoner in the hands of the Senora Martez."

Mrs. Emroled started to her feet—she had been ministering to her disabled husband's needs—with a half-suppressed scream.

"Don't tell me that—don't!" she cried, clasping her hands. "My darling—that is, Miss Inez, that brave, innocent child—in the hands of that woman! Oh, it cannot be! God would not permit it—it is too, too horrible!"

Both the detective and her husband gave her a quick, startled glance of caution, and she sunk, with a weak moan, at the side of her couch on which Emroled was lying, and buried her face in her hands.

It was all enigmatical to young Vanderlynn, on whom, however, nothing was lost.

Then Emroled alluded to the unexpected attack from outside the cave-entrance, by which Starlight and he had been surprised.

"But for that," said he, "we could have held the passage against double the number that were trying to force it. I had already laid two of them out with my club, and the boy's pistol had brought down another with a shot in the leg."

The detective had knitted his brows.

"That is the key to our defeat—that outside attack upon you," he said. "Even if the reinforcement that rescued you had arrived sooner, I doubt if it would have availed after that."

"Were the men we laid out made prisoners by your men?" asked Emroled.

"No; the fugitive gang must have succeeded in carrying them off."

Before taking his departure, the detective took Mrs. Emroled by the hand, speaking a few consoling words to her that Vanderlynn could not overhear; and also asked if he should send a guard to the cabin from the yacht.

The man of the house shook his head.

"Still," urged Ensco, "you must remember that the ruder elements of the band will now have reason to seek revenge upon you."

Emroled pointed to a shot-gun leaning in the corner.

"That will serve me for *them*," said he, significantly. "As for the ruling intelligences in the band, you ought to know, sir, whether they have most cause to hate or fear me."

The visitors then took their departure, the detective saying as he went:

"Be of good heart, both of you. I shall send you the first news I may receive of Miss Delorme's safety—and, as for Starlight, he shall not want for the best of care and treatment."

"An odd couple!" commented Vanderlynn, on the way back to the yacht.

"Very."

"Have probably known better days?"

"Like enough."

"The woman's interest in Miss Delorme specially intense."

"So it seems."

"Even emotional."

"You think so?"

"Who wouldn't? But what seemed to me particularly mysterious was the woman's regular agony over the thought of Miss Delorme's situation."

"The world is full of mysteries, my friend."

Though by no means satisfied, after this the younger man was prudent enough to hold his peace.

One of the pleasant surprises of their return to the Seamew was the spectacle of little Starlight on deck, with his head swathed almost out of sight in white bandages, but apparently neither his physical health nor his indomitable spirit much the worse for the hard knocks he had undergone.

"They wanted me to keep to my bunk, even after I'd come to myself, sir," he cried to Ensco.

"But not much of that soft slop in mine! as I said to Mr. Dago. Hurrah for our side, boss! Take a squint at our prisoners over there in the scuppers."

The prisoners were six in number, all more or less badly wounded, and not one of whom the detective could identify.

There were two dead bodies, however, that had been fished out from under the sunken barge, one of which he recognized as that of the river-pirate, Red Pete, who had been one of Juan's favorite personal attendants.

These were the only bodies that had been recovered, though both Dago and Gaff were of the opinion that several more might be under the river's surface.

Sail was now made without any further delay.

A halt was made at one of the upper New York piers, where the detective placed his prisoners and the dead bodies in charge of the police authorities, with the necessary explanations.

With a favoring wind, the Seamew reached the White Sibyl's strange hulk-dwelling at about three in the morning, but not without very cautiously feeling her way into moorings, in view

of the torpedo experience of the previous afternoon.

But the place was found to be absolutely deserted, notwithstanding that there were abundant evidences of a hasty visit, doubtless on the part of the proprietors, but a few hours before.

Ensco, Vanderlynn and Gaff explored the interior thoroughly, after forcing an entrance.

Much of the finery and even some of the furniture, which had been remarked on the former occasion, had been hurriedly removed.

"If the senora has only taken her snakes with her," said Tom Gaff, "there's a bit of comfort in that."

"Easy things to understand!" exclaimed Ensco, bitterly—and doubtless unconscious of quoting a fragment of the Poet Laureate's "Locksley Hall" in saying so. "She has been here before us, and is doubtless up and away again, with her prisoner, in that demon launch of hers."

"Looks very much like it," said Vanderlynn. "The devil himself couldn't overtake the craft, and she might live more commodiously in the launch than here."

"More of a steam-yacht than a steam-launch," coincided Gaff. "Barring the devil's crew she may carry, I wouldn't back out from crossing the Atlantic with her in summer weather."

"If I could only be sure—if I could only be sure!" repeated the detective, with his eyes restlessly searching the floor of the saloon in which they were standing.

"Sure of what?" queried Vanderlynn.

Here Ensco made a dive into a corner, and returned bearing a strip of red ribbon, with a tag of paper pinned to it.

"A clew!" he exclaimed, triumphantly. "I have it!"

"What is it?" cried Vanderlynn and Gaff in a breath.

Ensco was examining his find under a lamp.

"The ribbon was Miss Delorme's," said he.

"This paper contains some penciled words, in her handwriting!"

CHAPTER XV.

A FRESH CLEW.

THE communication—almost illegible, doubtless either through extreme haste or trepidation—was finally made out as follows:

"ENSOCO:—

"We are here but a few minutes while my captor's minions are transferring some of her effects to the steam-yacht, which she perhaps intends to be my prison un il you can rescue me, or Heaven comes to my relief in some other form. Were it not for you, I could almost wish that it were in the form of death. Alas! I cannot afford you the slightest hint as to our destination. This terrible woman! to what fate does she destine me? And yet she wants to be kind, in her awful way. Will this ever reach you? Heaven knows, or to what benefit, even though it may fall in your hands. But I know you will not rest in seeking for me. That is my sole consolation. I. D."

But for the necessity of his spelling out the foregoing with much difficulty, the detective, in view of its somewhat emotional tone, would scarcely have read it out aloud, or at least without some judicious reservations.

As it was, Vanderlynn eyed him a little jealously as he finished the reading.

"She loves him—him, the detective, the obscure man!" he thought. "Let it be no more denied that the pearl of woman's love is in a wheel, the blindfold drawing of which is the purest lottery! What are my wealth, my position, my sudden but powerful passion for that peerless girl, when the wealth of beauty and heart are so lavishly bestowed upon this nameless detective?"

Vanderlynn was a good, manly fellow for all that, and he none the less made up his mind that he would never willingly look on the dangerous fascination of Inez Delorme's face again.

"Nothing more is to be done—at least for the present," said Ensco, reluctantly. "There is no clew—no trace."

"I wouldn't say that, my friend," said Vanderlynn, energetically. "Nor would I let the matter rest for a single hour."

The detective smiled a little sarcastically.

"Come, then, Vanderlynn," said he, "what is it that you would do?"

"Put the New York police detective force of the whole country, if needs were—on the track of that infernal devil's yacht without delay."

"But if she has left no track—no more than the dissipated foam-bells in her stealthy wake?"

"Oh, the police would manage it somehow! And I would make the matter public anyway."

"Well, I wouldn't," said the detective, coldly; "and, moreover, I shall manage the matter somehow—have no fear of that."

"I hope you may!" this with a slight sneer.

Ensco marked the young man's irritable humor, and penetrated its cause.

He, however, made no reply, but led the way to the deck of the hulk, which communicated with the shore by a long, slender plank.

"Wright Vanderlynn," he then said, after motioning Gaff to return to the Seamew's deck, "if I err not, your participation in to-night's adventures was your own seeking?"

"Correct, my boy," replied Vanderlynn, who

was beginning to feel uneasy, if not wholly penitent, under the other's steel-cold iciness of manner.

"In return for your request to join us," continued Ensco, "I promised you any number of hard knocks—what you athletic club men consider a high old time—did I not?"

"Yes, you did."

"Well, you got them, didn't you?"

"I should say so."

The detective held out his hand.

"Good-by, then," said he. "The morning breaks, but you may get into bed before your aristocratic family are astir."

The young man flushed, and he would gladly have temporized, but there was something altogether new in the detective—new to him, at least—that held him off.

He laughed, nodded, touched the outstretched hand, and then sprung along the gang-plank.

"Snubbed!" he muttered to himself as he gained the road, "teetotally snubbed, and by a detective, too!"

But, as was said before, and was subsequently proved, Wright Vanderlynn was a thorough good fellow, for all, and with his heart in the right place.

There was literally nothing more to be done at that time.

The Seamew accordingly returned to her anchorage at Astoria, word was sent to the Marston residence of the misadventures that had befallen its young mistress, and the worn-out sharers of that night's extraordinary incidents sought the rest and recuperation of which they were in such abundant need.

Though the newspapers duly got hold of the stirring affair with the river pirates, and made sensational reports of the same, without knowing or saying anything about the inside romance of it all, even to the extent of remaining ignorant of the abduction feature—Ensco managed that shrewdly enough—four anxious and suspenseful days passed without the faintest sign or trace of the unknown region into which the demon steam yacht, with her terrible mistress and beautiful captive, seemed to have mysteriously melted.

For once in his life, the Harbor Detective was not only at his wits' end, but almost in despair.

The launch and her inmates could hardly have disappeared more absolutely than if she had suddenly sunk like a plummet into the deepest under-world mountain-gorge of the Atlantic Ocean's imperfectly-mapped, vaguely-sounded bottom.

Ensco was reluctantly thinking that he would have to seek the aid of the regular police detective force at last, and incidentally do what he had heretofore so shrunk from doing—namely, give the painful inside history of Inez Delorme's family affairs to the harsh ordeal of public criticism—when relief came to him from an altogether unexpected source.

It was in the shape of a note from Wright Vanderlynn, dated at Nyack, on the Hudson, in whose neighborhood the young man was spending a few days at his wealthy mother's country place.

It was as follows:

"DEAR ROWLOCK:—After treating the matter to a good dose of sober second thought, I find that I don't retain any hard feelings—however you may feel on the subject—for your rather cavalier manner—perhaps deserved on my part—when we last separated. In proof thereof, here is a secret for you:

"The Ghost is lying in a secluded little cove, called Deep Cove, a short distance south of this place, and not far from an odd little American-Dutch village of same name.

"I made the discovery, while out shooting, by the merest accident, but didn't venture upon any inquiries or investigations.

Yours truly,

WRIGHT VANDERLYNN."

"At last!" sighed the detective, drawing a long breath. "By Jove! I *did* treat Vanderlynn cavalierly, and he is a perfect brick."

Then he hurried to consult over the letter with Mr. Dago.

The latter's face also lighted up as he read it.

"A boon, indeed!" he exclaimed. "And hiding away in such a place, too!"

"You know the cove?"

"Perfectly."

"The particulars, please?"

"Oh, there are not many to give. Deep Cove is about as secluded a corner, or rather cranny, of the Hudson as I know of. I was born within five miles of it."

"West side?"

"Yes?"

"Above or below Nyack?"

"Below, say two miles."

"Best rapid route there?"

"By the West Shore Road."

"What station?"

"Nyack."

"What, and that further on?"

"Yes; the last station this side is five miles distant."

"Describe the cove."

"A gap in the wild river-bank, so narrow as scarcely to be discerned from a passing steam-

er."

"Well?"

"There's where the railroad bridges it, at the narrowest part. Further back the cove widens out, but not greatly, and the water is very deep."

"Anything more?"

"No; just the sort of hole in the cliffs where a yacht might lurk, unsuspected and unquestioned, for a twelvemonth."

"The village near at hand that Vanderlynn mentions?"

"Village! Yes, a blacksmith, a church, and perhaps ten houses and hen-coops. Colonial Dutch from away back. I doubt but the folks speak in Rip Van Winkle Dutch to the present day."

"Good-by!"

"What! off at once?"

"Yes; for secret preliminary investigations. You can get the Seamew ready in an hour?"

"Yes."

"I'll meet you at the mouth of Deep Cove. You ought to be there by daybreak to-morrow."

"Yes, with the south wind holding."

"Make no mistake then."

"Hold on! Won't you take even Starlight with you?"

But Ensco was already getting a few traveling necessities together, for this was in the cabin of the Seamew.

"No; better alone."

"Shall I send word to Mrs. Twiggs?"

"Not a syllable."

"How long will the expedition last, think you?"

"Till we have cut out the Ghost, set Miss Delorme at liberty, and clapped handcuffs on the senorina."

And then the detective was already half up the companionway.

This was late in the afternoon. By dusk he had boarded a West Shore train.

CHAPTER XXVI.

A RAILROAD INCIDENT.

THE detective had calculated that he should reach Nyack in an hour's time.

He would there disguise himself, and hire a team for Deep Cove without delay.

After that he would be governed in his inquiries concerning the ambushed steam yacht by circumstances.

But the mapped-out designs of men, like those of mice, "gang aft agley."

He was not on the train five minutes before he was convinced that he was the object of suspicious watchfulness on the part of four rough-looking, sinister men.

A glance of his eye revealed that they were not strangers to each other, though they wished to appear so.

"I should have donned my disguise before quitting the yacht," he thought, "but there is no help for it now."

The train had just started when he saw Hank Williams, a trusted Express messenger of his acquaintance, passing hurriedly forward.

The man caught his eye at the same instant, and gave him a signal.

A moment later they were in conversation on the forward platform, adjoining the Express compartment of the baggage car.

"You saw those four suspicious-looking men?" asked the messenger.

"Yes."

"What did you think?"

"That they might be spotting me."

"You are on a vital mission then?"

"Yes; but only as far as Nyack."

"You are somewhat out as to the four men."

"Am I?"

"I feel certain of it."

"How so?"

"It is me they are tracking, not you."

"Ah!"

"One of them has been dodging me all the way from the office: the others joined him at the depot."

"Indeed!" And Ensco felt comparatively relieved on his own account.

"Will you stand by me at a pinch, old fellow?" was the messenger's next question.

"I should say so."

"Come with me into my car, then. I am carrying a larger amount for the company than usual, and naturally feel a little nervous."

He opened the door of the Express car with his key as he spoke, and they entered it.

"You can go now," said the messenger to a trainman, who was keeping guard over the safe. "I shall make it right with you before we separate."

He let the man out by the same door, and then carefully locked it.

Besides the burglar-proof safe, there were some few kegs and chests in the compartment, which had sliding side-doors, like those of the adjoining baggage-car.

One of these side-doors, the one looking out over the river, was open, the evening being sultry.

The car also contained some chairs and a small table, and the messenger speedily produced a bottle and two glasses.

"Let us be comfortable," said he, as the two seated themselves.

The detective joined him in a glass.

"You see," said Williams, "under the suspicious circumstances, I naturally feel sort of backed up in the society of a man like you, Ensco."

"Thank you; but, as I said, I go no further than Nyack."

"And just there another old friend of mine will board the train, so that I shall have company as far as my destination."

"Good! but may you not be mistaken with regard to those four chaps?"

"Certainly; but can a man be over careful or over-suspicious in my place?"

"No; hardly."

Then the detective took a survey of his surroundings.

"Combination lock?" he asked, referring to the safe.

"Yes."

"Couldn't you get into it, yourself?"

"No; the combination is only known to the agent at the end of my route."

"What could robbers do, then, even with you at their mercy?"

"Tumble it out over the cliffs, and burst it open at their leisure."

"Ah! I understand. What may those kegs contain?"

"Silver specie."

"And those little chests?"

"Gold coin."

"The deuce! but you are loaded this time."

"More than ever before in my experience."

"That was what made me nervous—before meeting you."

"You've been with the company a long time, Hank?"

"Eighteen years a messenger."

"Must have had some adventures with bad men?"

"A dozen or more."

"Did they ever get away with you?"

"Once only."

"Give us the yarn."

"It was in Missouri, on the Iron Mountain road. I was stunned, on my back, bound hand and foot, almost before I realized my danger."

"Did they get the swag?"

"Yes; but fortunately a light one. I was badly hurt, and the company paid hospital expenses."

"Was that your worst snap?"

"Not by a jugful! I fought off five masked men on the Union Pacific for more than an hour, and brought off my packages, too."

"Tell about that one."

The messenger complied, and in this manner the time slipped unconsciously along.

The last station before Nyack had been called, and the messenger was deep in a fresh story of adventure.

Suddenly the small door flew open, as if neither locked or latched, and three ruffians, armed to the teeth, bounded silently into the compartment.

Ensco and Williams were on their feet in an instant, but before they could draw a weapon the scoundrels had closed with them in a desperate hand-to-hand grapple.

To add to the disparity, a fourth ruffian swung in by the side door, from the roof of the car, and at once participated in the attack.

It was soon over.

Ensco reeled back early in the struggle, almost prostrated from a blow with a pistol-butt.

When he recovered two of the men had him tightly pinioned, while the two others were leaning over the messenger, who was bound hand and foot, bringing him around from a faint by dashing cold water on his forehead.

Williams gnashed his teeth when he realized the situation.

"But you've had your trouble for nothing," he growled, defiantly. "The chests and kegs are too heavy for you to carry off, and I couldn't show you the combination of the safe if I wished. I am as ignorant of it as yourselves."

The men, who were identical with those suspected by the detective at the outset, were villainous-looking scoundrels of somewhat foreign aspect.

The one who seemed to be their leader took it upon himself to answer the messenger's defiance, and in a most unlooked-for fashion.

"You're somewhat out!" said he, with a slight foreign accent. "We don't want your treasure."

The messenger was astounded.

"Not robbers?" he gasped; "not after the treasure in my charge?"

"No."

"Then what do you want?"

The leader pointed, with a sinister smile, to Ensco.

"That man's life!" he replied.

The detective understood in a flash. His first impression as to the man's object had been correct.

Scarcely had the leader spoke before the two men having Ensco in their grasp made a movement to hurl him out of the side-door.

The train was going at express speed; outside was the sheer wall of the precipitous river-bank.

The detective suddenly broke from his cap-

tors, with an involuntary exclamation of horror.

"Fight to the last, Rowlock!" yelled the messenger. "Would to God I could lend you a hand!"

But, all four ruffians assisting, Ensco was once more overpowered.

"Be ready now!" said the leader, and, grasping their victim securely, they imparted a swinging, seesaw motion to his body. "That's it. One—two—three!"

And the unfortunate detective was hurled into space.

But even in this terrible crisis Rowlock retained something of his presence of mind.

Down, down, down!

This was his first sensation, as he expected to be dashed to death every instant.

Then he struck upon something elastic and springy.

After that he seemed to bound up and off, like an india-rubber ball, and the next instant was floundering in deep water.

CHAPTER XXVII.

DEEP COVE.

COMING quickly to the surface, the astonished detective succeeded in reaching the shore.

It was a bright night, with a new moon.

The causes contributing to his extraordinary escape from death explained themselves.

A hundred feet overhead, cutting into the face of the sloping precipice, ran the line of the railroad.

There was a narrow field between the foot of the precipice and the water, and on this narrow field a small barn, with a huge, half-overturned haystack beside it.

The haystack had saved him.

He had doubtless alighted on its summit in a sitting position, bounded thence off into the river; and, moreover, he was certain that he had not sustained any injury whatever.

Congratulating himself, the detective was proceeding along a faintly-defined road under the cliff when he came to a narrow inlet, and at the mouth of the inlet there was a small cottage.

Meeting a boy, he inquired as to his whereabouts.

The lad was frightened, and replied in a sort of gibberish that could not be understood.

But just then a woman appeared at the door of the cottage, and with her the detective was more successful, for she answered him in tolerable English.

"We don't often see strangers along shore here, sir," she explained, in response to his first advances. "The boy is from back in the settlement, where they seldom speak English, among themselves at least."

"What do they speak, pray?"

"Low Dutch."

"Oh! and what may be the name of this place, ma'am?"

"Deep Cove."

Ensco repressed an exclamation.

Here he was at the very threshold of his destination, at the narrow mouth of Deep Cove itself, and through the very mishap that was intended for his destruction.

"You are dripping wet, sir," said the woman, peering out at him. "Have you met with an accident?"

"Ye-es; a sort of one."

"Ah, I see; you have perhaps been fishing, and fallen overboard. That sometimes happens hereabouts. Will you come in and dry yourself? My husband will be home presently."

Rowlock gratefully accepted the invitation, and, while following her into the cottage, managed to slip on his false beard, being satisfied that she had not as yet observed his face closely.

This proved to be the case.

The woman's husband made his appearance while the detective was drying himself at the kitchen fire, and he proved as hospitable as she.

They seemed to be a simple, hard-working couple, also of Dutch descent but with something more of worldly knowledge than their Deep Cove neighbors, with whose family affairs they seemed quite familiar.

Ensco permitted them to retain the impression that he had fallen overboard from a fishing-boat, and was soon sharing their frugal supper with them, and feeling himself generally at home.

"You have a quiet, secluded spot here," said he. "I wouldn't mind being better acquainted with it. Is there good fishing in the cove?"

"Only in spots," replied the man, "and the villagers are careful to keep them secret. We are very stupid and old fashioned," he continued, smiling, "and strangers are not always welcome among us."

"You seem to be an exception to the rule, then."

"We once passed a whole winter in Tarrytown," interposed the woman, with some conscious pride. "We're a little more civilized than others around here."

"And I worked a whole year over in the new aqueduct," supplemented her husband. "If my health hadn't broken down in the tunnels, I wouldn't be back here growing potatoes among these people."

"Ah, indeed! Nothing like travel and wide intercourse to enlarge one's ideas. Now I'm rather fond of solitude and the picturesque."

"I ain't!" said the cottager, decidedly.

"Nor me nuther!" echoed his better-half.

"Still," added the detective, deprecatingly, "you allow for a difference of tastes?"

"Oh, of course!" from both.

"Now, I've taken a notion for a moonlight trip back yonder in your cove. Anything worth seeing up there?"

The couple exchanged glances.

"You'd better not try it—at least, not by night," advised the man.

"No, indeed!" added the woman.

"Why? Haven't you a boat to spare—for pay, of course?"

"Oh, yes; we've a boat you'd be welcome to."

And the man uneasily crossed his legs afresh.

"Then what's your objection to my going?"

"There ain't no objection, only—"

"Only what?"

"Everything ain't just right back in the cove, sir," said the man, huskily, while his wife drew closer to the fire.

"Not right? Oh, never mind the Dutchmen's want of hospitality! I sha'n't trouble them."

"It ain't the Dutchmen, sir," interposed the good-wife, solemnly. "They're harmless enough, and they can be kind, too, for that matter."

"What is to be feared, then?"

"The Ghost!" the man took it on himself to reply.

The detective dissembled his increased interest, which was sufficiently vivid.

"A ghost?" he cried, laughing. "Come, now, I have a sort of fancy for ghosts. What sort of one is it that haunts Deep Cove—male or female."

"Neither, sir. It's a ship, or rather a sort of witch's steamboat, and that's her name—the Ghost."

"Oh, is that all? only her name?"

"But that ain't all, sir! She's a ghost by natur', no less than by name—or the devil himself, for that matter—and the devil's witch commands and lives in her."

"Dear me! but, my good friends, you only increase my curiosity. Give me some particulars of this strange craft, which I really must investigate by moonlight."

"Don't do it, sir!" they exclaimed in the one breath.

"Well, satisfy my curiosity anyway. When did the Ghost arrive in the cove?"

"Soon after daybreak, four days ago," said the cottager. "She's all dead black; she slips through the water like an arrow, but without a ripple; there ain't a sign of captain, crew or engineer; only the devil's white witch that runs her, and a poor, purty little gal what may be her slave, fastened down to her side by some hideous spell."

The wife at this juncture shuddered, and threw her apron over her face and head.

"Now this is interesting!" And the detective rubbed his hands.

"I call it horrible!" said the man.

"Never mind, tell me more. You saw the witch-woman, then?"

"We all saw her, that is, on the first day, when she even went into the village to buy some vegetables. Since then she's kept out of sight, though still on board."

"How do you know that?"

"By her voice—her occasional singin', which is as wild and beautiful as her face is frightful—so them say as heard it."

"Perhaps it was the captive, the young girl under the spell, they heard."

"No; the witch spoke to several when on shore. The singin' is hers; every one is agreed on that."

"Did the young girl go with her when she visited the shore?"

"No; she was only seen once, when on deck with the witch."

"What is the witch like?"

"Like a live corpse, only beautiful and—dreadful, with eyes in her head what would mesmerize a—ox!"

"Tell him about the snakes!" interposed the woman, with a sort of wail. "Don't furgit to tell about the snakes!"

"Oh!" and the cottager hurried himself to the front, so to speak; "I was nigh to furgettin' that. Yes; there's snakes!"

"Snakes?"

"Yes; sort of pets—yeller, blue, white an' speckled. Two young men who were fishing near the steamboat the first day, saw her with 'em. They crawled all over and around her. Luke Van Tassel, one of the young chaps, swore he saw her swaller one a yard long, an' then coax it back again out of her left ear with a stick of candy."

"Really? This is astonishing. Come, my friend, your boat, your boat! I sha'n't rest till I've had a look at this goblin craft."

The detective was now so thoroughly in earnest that they gave over the attempt to dissuade him.

Five minutes later, as Ensco stepped into the cottager's rickety skiff at the mouth of the cove, he dropped a coin into the man's palm.

"It's gold—a five-dollar piece!" exclaimed the man, staring at the coin in the moonlight.

"For your secrecy, no less than for your boat. Be faithful until my return, and you shall have as much more."

"Oh, Lord, sir! I'm your man."

"Wait; a yacht may draw in here by day-break, before my return. Her arrival is also to be kept secret."

"All right, sir; all right! God preserve you!"

The detective rowed off up through the dark neck of Deep Cove.

By less than half an hour's cautious pulling, he was in the deep shadow of an overhanging bank, directly under the Ghost's quarter.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE PHANTOM LAUNCH AGAIN.

ENSCO was satisfied in his own mind that he had approached thus near to the phantom yacht without attracting attention, even supposing a lookout to be on board, which did not seem likely.

In fact, the strange vessel had every appearance of being wholly deserted.

Presently, however, a low, sweet voice, in a wailing Spanish or Portuguese song, came floating from somewhere in the interior.

"Ah!" thought the detective, "the simple country folk were doubtless right. Though I can't remember to ever heard Zarapatta Martez lift her voice in song in the old wild days, I feel quite certain that the voice is hers."

He lay on his oars in the deep shadow of the bank for some moments, listening in silence.

The effect amid the profound solitude of the land-locked inlet was impressively weird and sad.

A few lights were still twinkling in the little hamlet on the hillside opposite, but that was all. On every other side the dark hills rose abruptly from the water's edge, the inlet being so completely and loftily folded in that even the moonlight only spangled and mottled it in small spaces.

Shaking off the spell of the music with an effort Ensco was about to risk a stealthy circuit of the vessel, in the hope of more satisfactory discoveries, when the soft, swishing splash of muffled oars reached his practiced ear.

He accordingly drew yet closer under the bank, and waited.

A moment later, the dark outline of a boat containing four occupants, slipped out from near where he lay on her way to the Ghost.

When a narrow strip of moonlight was crossed the detective's hands tightened on his oars, and his jaws came together with a soft but decisive snap.

He had recognized the occupants as the same ruffians who had so recently hurled him to his seeming doom out of the Express messenger's car.

The boat touched the steam yacht's side, and her inmates disappeared over the rail.

"So," thought the detective, "we shall make even a better haul than could have been anticipated when we cut out that accursed yacht. In addition to cutting the White Sibyl's claws and restoring Inez to liberty, we shall have a chance at those last would-be murderers of mine. Patience, my soul; patience and prudence!"

Nevertheless, his desire to make further investigations without delay—especially with regard to Nessie's continued presence on board—presently became overmastering.

He only waited long enough to improvise a muffling for his own oars, out of some rags and cord that he found in the skiff's locker, and then stealthily pulled out from the shadow of the bank.

By incessant caution, and an avoidance of every patch of moonlight when possible, he managed to make a complete circuit of the vessel without attracting attention from on board.

He finally came to a pause directly under the deep overhang of the stern.

Here he remained listening intently, for a faint light was now visible in the after ports, whose dead-lights were wide open, and he could just catch the murmur of voices within.

However, the words were not audible, or distinguishable, and his impatience increased.

A fresh risk might be destructive, but he resolved to take it.

Fortunately the moon was on the vessel's bow, which left the shadow of the stern overhang broad, dense and deep.

Making his skiff fast to the rudder, he succeeded in climbing in through a port-hole without making a sound.

He was in a small extreme-aft compartment, separated by a ground-glass door from the adjoining cabin, in which the light was shining, and whence the murmuring voices proceeded.

He could distinguish the words now, but only with the utmost straining of his sense of hearing.

There were two voices, of one of which he had no doubt, but of the other he was a little less certain.

The latter, very soft and musical, seemed to be the senora's.

The former, also low-pitched, but none the less masculine, he was sure belonged to the leader of the ruffianly group who had hurled him from the Express car.

"*Por Dios!*" murmured the womanish voice; "if you have killed the Harbor Detective, that is the main point—a glorious point."

"He can't have escaped!"

"But Rowlock is said to have more lives than a cat."

"If he had had a hundred, they would have been dashed out of him. You should have seen how we sent him flying!"

There was a low, musical laugh, with enough of the devil in it to be the White Sibyl's.

"Wouldn't I have liked to? It was a deep abyss, then?"

"Two hundred feet, if a yard, with rocks and the river below!"

"*Bueno!* You got off the train at Nyack, of course?"

"Yes; and then hurried back here."

"No talk there about our presence here, as yet?"

"Not a word."

"*Excelente!* We are still secure, then, and have only to keep up our mysterious movements and appearances to continue the awe-struck attitude of the simple yokels hereabouts."

"Any further orders?"

"No; that will do. Take your mates into the forecabin, and get something to eat. Jago is on deck, now?"

"Yes."

"*Buenas noches!*"

And then, as a door was heard to close, the musical voice took up its sweet, melancholy singing again, as an indication that its owner was once more alone.

Not the least allusion to Inez, so far!

Still not fully satisfied that the voice was the senorina's, and loth, in spite of the continued risk, to relinquish the hope of catching sight, if the merest glimpse of his dear betrothed, the detective was hesitating what next to do, when he suddenly had his first named doubts set to rest, and in a most unexpected manner:

A serpent—one of the yellow variety that the White Sibyl seemed most to affect in her extraordinary tastes—crept into view from amid the rich hangings of the compartment in which he crouched, and crossed the floor in a lazy, leisurely way before disappearance.

It might even have crept over and perhaps strung him while he had been listening so intently there.

In spite of his nerve, a cold perspiration suffused him.

"A doubting Thomas himself would be satisfied now," he thought.

The next instant he was half out of the window by which he had entered.

He was clinging with one hand, with his head just under the taffrail, when a stealthy step just behind it startled him.

He held his breath, peered up, and waited.

Then the bushy head and evil face of the man Jago were craned out over the rail.

The men's eyes met, but before Jago could start back or sound an alarm, his throat was in the detective's grip of steel.

It was a critical predicament for Rowlock, but his decision was taken in an instant.

His reserve force of muscular power was simply prodigious.

Notwithstanding the Spaniard being a burly, strong man, slowly and noiselessly in that tremendous one-handed grip was he drawn out over the stern, the detective in the mean time feeling his way down the stern-post with his feet and remaining hand.

Still, as the next best thing to his getting with his throttled prisoner into the skiff directly, which he found an impossibility, Ensco at last quietly dropped into the water with him.

Here, while holding on to the rudder, and using his teeth to haul on the skiff's line, a most unexpected interruption occurred.

There was a sudden swish of the rudder, a twirl of the propeller screw, and the Ghost began to forge swiftly a head.

Losing hold of the rudder, the detective had just time to seize the skiff's gunwale, while still hanging on to his captive, when he was drawn over on his back by the rapidity with which he was being dragged through the water.

Bettering his position by a great effort, he still retained his clutch of both skiff and man until the yacht had made a complete circuit of the land-locked space, and returned to her original anchorage, where she again became motionless.

All this was immensely, not to say uncomfortably, mysterious to our Harbor Detective.

How had the Ghost heaved anchor, got up steam and started her engine in such absolute silence? And what had been her object in making the brief and apparently useless circuit of the cove?

Relegating the first question to the general unaccountability of the Ghost's nautical character, Ensco answered the last by inferring that it was merely in keeping with the plan he had heard enunciated by the musical voice—i. e., to keep up a certain mystery of movements and appearances, for the benefit of the awe-struck yokels of the neighborhood.

While revolving these things in his mind, he had climbed into the skiff with his captive, cut the painter-line, and, by a careful sculling move-

ment of one oar, was slipping away into the shadows toward the narrowing neck of the cove.

When at last he released his iron grip upon the Spaniard's throat, there certainly seemed to have been no need of the clutch for some time back, so far as preventing an outcry was concerned.

The man fell over, limp and apparently lifeless, in the bottom of the skiff.

"No wonder!" thought the detective. "I should have thought of that before. Between the choking and the drowning the poor devil has undergone, it would be little less than miraculous if he were not done for completely."

However, after rowing as far back as midway into the neck of the cove, he set about trying to bring the fellow back to consciousness, and at last succeeded.

Jago opened his eyes, sat up, stared about him, and at last seemed to comprehend the situation.

"Here!" said the detective, tendering his brandy-flask. "Take another and a long pull at this. It may sort of brace you up."

Jago obeyed, and with such literalness that the flask was two-thirds drained when it was returned.

He then, however, though apparently fully restored, merely wiped his bearded lips with the back of his hand, and, with a low grunt, propped himself in the stern in stoical silence, though casting another longing look at the flask, as the detective returned it to his pocket.

"Now, my man," said the latter, "I want to have a little quiet talk with you."

"Me no talk," said the Spaniard, and he was about as good as his word.

The detective's most genial and persuasive efforts to extract some information with regard to the inmates of the Ghost, and especially as to Miss Delorme and the senorina, might as well have been exerted upon the air.

Jago sometimes grunted, and occasionally he smiled, but not an articulated syllable would he vouchsafe in response.

"This is growing a trifle monotonous," observed the detective, smiling.

He produced a special revolver of his, slowly denuded it of the rubber sheathing that had kept it dry from the river's drenching, and examined its chambers carefully.

Then he coolly cocked it, presented it point-blank to his prisoner's heart, while the smile on his lips took on a peculiarly deadly aspect.

"Now will you answer my questions?" he demanded, in Spanish.

CHAPTER XXIX.

SUSPENSEFUL MOMENTS.

BUT the Spaniard was true grit.

He had slightly started at the first blush of the leveled revolver, and he was not unfamiliar with the iron determination of the man that presented it to his heart, but that was all.

He merely yawned sleepily, threw back his head with a sense of weariness, and closed his eyes, as much as to say:

"Well, blaze away; but, for mercy's sake, don't talk me to death!"

Ensco's eyes glittered savagely.

"You know the penalty of your refusal?"

At last Jago did speak.

"Yes, senor, I do," he replied, with the utmost calmness, while slowly opening his eyes.

"It is death," said Rowlock, sternly.

"I know it, senor."

"And you still refuse to answer?"

"Certainly, senor. There is crime, even blood, on my hands, but treachery to a master or mistress—never!"

Rowlock uncocked and put up the weapon with a muttered oath.

"You're a brave man, whatever you may have been!" he said, sullenly.

The man inclined his head, and seemed relapsing into his stubborn silence.

The detective was not inclined to give up.

It seemed more important than it really was that his prisoner should be induced to unbosom himself.

Suddenly a fresh thought occurred to him.

He reproduced, not the revolver, but the brandy-flask.

"See, my man!" and he dangled it in the moon-rays so that the considerable quantity of spirits yet remaining sparkled very temptingly through the glass. "Would you like another nip?"

The temptation in that accursed form has overcome many and many a better and stronger nature than the poor, ignorant bravo's.

A new eagerness had sprung into Jago's dark eyes.

He stretched forth his hand, and there was a tremor in it.

"Yes, yes, senor!" he exclaimed, fawningly.

"More cognac—more, more!"

"Not so fast! Answer my questions first, then all that remains in the flask is yours."

"No, no, senor; the cognac first—the cognac first!"

Ensco reflected, and then resolved to take the chances.

"Promise to answer my questions truly, after you shall have drunk?"

"No, no; ah, señor! we cannot promise."

"Bueno, then! No promise, no brandy! That's the talk."

"Oh, but, señor, me very foolish, me very talky when me drunk!"

The detective handed over the flask.

When it had quitted the Spaniard's eager lips, not a drop remained.

Jago returned the flask with a polite smile, and cleared his throat with a sort of reluctant gusto, though it was a large pint that had gone down his red lane within a space of twenty minutes.

"Ah!" commented Rowlock, his good-humor already restored; "nothing like that devil's stuff to loosen a stubborn tongue—that is, in some folks. Eh, Jago?"

Jago smiled appreciatively.

"Now to business!" And, rubbing his hands, the detective began to go over his questions again.

Short-lived exultation!

The Spaniard was once more as dumb as an oyster.

It began to dawn slowly upon our professional friend that he might have been taken in.

"Curse you!" he cried; "you promised that the stuff would make you talk."

Jago smiled deprecatingly.

"When drunk, yes, señor," said he. "But many little flasks like that wouldn't make me drunk."

Ensco gritted his teeth, and tossed the flask away.

Then, more ashamed of himself than angry at the Spaniard, he forced the latter to take to the oars, and continued his course through the neck of the cove.

When near its mouth, the sound of other muffled oars than their own fell upon their ears.

"It's too early for the Seamew people to arrive yet," thought the detective. "What can this be?"

And he steered in under the high bank, enforced silence on the Spaniard's part at the point of the revolver, and waited.

A large yawl, with a number of rowers, keeping excellent precision with their long, powerful all but soundless strokes, came into view from the midmost waters of the lordly Hudson.

A near strip of moonlight was crossed, and Juan Martez, moodily contemplative, was visible at the stern.

The soft pure light flashed for an instant over his bended head, upon his burnished revolver and poniard-hilt, over the dark, swaying forms of his bearded followers, and then all had vanished up into the deep cove's narrow throat.

In a few minutes the yawl was out of sight and hearing.

"Good!" said the detective, unconsciously voicing his thought. "So many more to be scooped in when we cut out the steam-launch."

Jago gave a guttural exclamation, and he seemed about to speak.

But he did not, and the detective knew better than to renew the attempt upon the fellow's taciturnity.

An hour was yet wanting to daybreak when the cottager's little landing place was reached, and it would not do to re-enter the cottage, without certain explanations that might not be prudent.

So, having nothing better to pass the time with, the detective kept his prisoner leisurely at the oars a little offshore, and continued waiting.

It was wearisome enough, but soon after the first dawn-strokes began to appear in the East, the well-known yacht came in sight, tacking upstream in the teeth of a dry, gentle, northwest wind.

Ten minutes later Ensco was on board, with his prisoner in irons.

He consulted with Dago and Gaff, after recounting his experiences.

With the small number of men at command—only six in all, including Mingo, Jones and little Starlight—it was immensely risky to make the attack, even if a perfect surprise of the Ghost were effected.

But it was decided to make the attempt, as the opportunity might never again occur.

"With about four more good men, I should feel secure," said the detective. "Or even if Wright Vanderlynn might alone be with us once more."

"Wait," said John Dago. "As I told you, Mr. Ensco, I was born hereabouts, and am familiar with the neighborhood."

"What of that? The cove doesn't require any piloting, and is less than a mile in extent."

"I ought to be aware of that. But did you notice a large, dark old house, high up on a wooded hillside just at the first widening of the inner cove?"

"Yes."

"Four stalwart, dare-devil brothers, former schoolmates of mine, who would jump at the chance of sharing in our proposed adventure, ought to be still living there."

"What is their name?"

"Ten Eyck."

"Ah, Dutchmen, too?"

Mr. Dago smiled.

"Of that extraction, as am I, likewise," he

rejoined. "I think I could secretly bring them to join us, while the rest of you are towing in the Seamew. I suppose that will be safest, eh? to make the attack with the yacht herself?"

"By far the safer," assented Ensco, cordially grasping his hand. "You have taken the steel ram on our bow, of course."

"Yes; and with any sort of momentum, the Seamew would cut her way through a line-of-battle ship."

"Good! and may the wind necessarily be forthcoming on the inside, though I doubt it. All right, then; and I only hope you may find the stalwart brothers at home."

The Seamew had all this time been slowly entering the mouth of the cove, though the wind was now almost nil by reason of the inshore loftiness of the hills.

Accordingly, while Mr. Dago forthwith pulled away on his mission in the cottager's skiff, the rest of the force proceeded to tow in the yacht in her pinnace.

The moon had sunk behind the hills, and there was yet a good half-hour of the latter's deep shadowings to be looked for before the new dawn should have greatly increased its signal fires.

Moreover, they proceeded with muffled oars, and, as has been said, the inlet did not stretch very far into the land.

"This is prime," commented Starlight, who had wholly recovered his strength and vim, and was manfully doing his share of the work. "I feel romantic, I do."

Mingo gave his contemptuous grunt.

"What's yer gwine ter do, young feller?" he inquired. "An' what makes yer feel more-antic?"

"Oh, it's bully, Mingo. I feel like Bullrag, the Buccaneer, on his way to cut out Fire-Flipper, the Red-avenging Pirate of the Gulf. Didn't you ever read that book, old man?"

"I don't read no sich trash, nuffin' else," growled the sable giant, bending to his oar. "Go 'long wi' you, bantam cock."

Here silence was enjoined, and the slow work proceeded.

And it was slow work.

However, just at the inner winding of the neck there came a puff of wind, and the drooping sail of the dragged Seamew began to fill out.

"Splendid," ejaculated Tom Gaff, under his breath. "It's shifted fully two points east, and we're in luck."

Here Mingo dropped his oar and stared back at the yacht, every one else following the direction of his gaze.

A dark figure, moving with seeming difficulty, was trying to manipulate her rigging in some way.

"It's my prisoner, that infernal Spaniard!" exclaimed Rowlock. "Back water, and be lively! He's up to some mischief, I'll be sworn!"

Mingo did not wait for the comparatively slow action of the boat, but was overboard in an instant, swimming back to the yacht as only he could swim.

When the rest of the party got on board, three minutes later, the black had the Spaniard underneath him on deck, and the latter was undergoing a terrible strangling, which in another minute must have proved fatal.

"He was tryin' to cut the halyards," cried Mingo, as Ensco rushed upon him to interfere. "In anudder minute he'd hev hed de big sail down."

"No matter," and here the detective succeeded in rescuing the Spaniard, in the nick of time. "He's a brave man, Mingo, for all his deviltry, and if he meets death it shall be at the public executioner's hands."

Jago was secured afresh and taken below.

At this juncture the skiff was seen returning, and four men were in it besides Mr. Dago.

A few minutes later the four Ten Eyck brothers were introduced on board by their ancient schoolmate.

They were powerfully-built, fearless-looking countrymen, who, moreover, appeared to be eager for the fray.

"Welcome!" said the detective, taking them successively by the hand. "I doubted your willingness, my friends, when Dago acknowledged that you were Dutchmen, but I gladly ask pardon for my mistake."

"Dutch be hanged, sir!" cried Jake Ten Eyck, the elder of the stalwart brothers, his broad shoulders shaking with his good-humored laugh. "We're true American farmer men, by two hundred and fifty years descent, and there's not a man of us has ever backed out of a square, hard fight in an honest cause."

Everybody joined in cheering the Ten Eycks, though with more earnestness than vociferousness, and it was the general impression that the attacking force was now but little short of invincible.

"What luck! what glorious luck!" exclaimed Dago, who was at the wheel. "Just look at her fill out, Ensco!"

In fact, the wind, which had freshened not a little, was now fairly on the Seamew's quarter, and she was springing to her work as the steed that knows his rider.

Behind was the glowing redness of the increasing day; before stretched the widening cove, but even more deeply shadowed now than when only the moonlight touched its mirroring surface; beyond, faintly outlined against the deader background of the heavily-wooded shore, lay the steam-yacht, perfectly motionless upon the tideless cove.

"The Seamew's occupants waited in breathless suspense."

"Shall we cut right into her amidships?" queried Dago in a low voice.

The detective nodded.

On and on headed the white-winged yacht, her knife-like ram leveled straight at the sleeping enemies' waist!

CHAPTER XXX.

"WHEN GREEK MEETS GREEK."

It was a moment of intense and painful suspense.

The Ghost might have been a floating tomb, for all of life or movement that was visible aboard.

Black, graceful, silent, unconscious, she seemed no more than a nautical corpse, insensate and indifferent to her seemingly certain doom.

Suddenly a paralyzing thought flashed through the detective's brain.

Inez Delorme!

Might she not—indeed, was she not more than likely to—meet her death or agonizing injury in the shock that was now inevitable?

The thought turned him cold, but it was too late now.

The Seamew was silently pressing on, her knife-like steel ram cleaving the wave with the arrowy stealthiness of a black shark's razor-back fin.

Not a cable's length was now remaining between the ram and its destined prey.

Suddenly, however, and with the spectral unexpectedness of her character, the Ghost spun around, as if upon an unseen pivot, and her prow, instead of her broadside, was presented to the rushing blow.

Nor was this all.

Something was noted, entirely unexpected before.

Her prow was, likewise, provided with an added metal nose that answered as a ram.

However, the Seamew had the best of the collision, which occurred almost instantly.

Her blow was a powerful, though slanting one, and the Ghost shivered under it from stern to stern, while her above-water casing was ripped off like so much card-board for a length of a dozen feet.

But instantly her deck was black with men, she sheered off easily, while the Seamew was recoiling with her first shudder, and the ringing voices of both Juan and Vasco could be heard calling on their men to stand fast.

The next instant, however, the Seamew was grappled to her.

"Steady, there!" shouted the detective, in his cold, steely tones. "Now!"

And the ten men of the attacking party, with waving weapons, poured like a living, devastating torrent down over the steam-yacht's deck.

Little Starlight had not been so Quixotic or far out of the way in likening the situation to the days of piratical romance.

It was an old-fashioned sea-fight—a page out of the picturesque past—and right there in the bosom of New York State, in the year of 1887.

The day had broadened, so that everything was distinctly visible.

The Ghost men, though outnumbering the assailants two to one were at first swept into rout by the fury of the boarding party, notwithstanding the frantic bravery of the twin commanders.

But they made a stand aft, and then the fight was at its climax.

Revolvers cracked, knives flashed, bludgeons rose and fell, and there was a pandemonium of shouts, curses and yells.

But the four Ten Eycks, though armed solely with stout hickory staves, were like backwoods screamers from away back, Mingo was a whole team in himself, every one else in the attacking party seemed nerved to the performance of prodigies, and, moreover, organized discipline seemed to be in the ascendant on the part of the Seamew's people.

Several of the river-pirates had been laid out in the first rush, and now they were still getting the worst of the blows and peppering, though doggedly holding their ground at the head of the companionway.

A slight diversion was offered in their favor by Jago again bursting his bonds, and suddenly making his appearance from the Seamew, and frantically falling upon the assailants' flank with a flourished capstan bar.

"Bravo, muchache!" yelled Vasco. "You're my man, Jago! Keep it up! Down with the sleuth-hound spies!"

"He's my man now, and worthy of my bullet, too!" growled the detective, who had wheeled upon his heel in time. "Jago, you seem bound to have it."

His revolver spoke yet more emphatically than his tongue, and the Spaniard at the same

instant toppled overboard with the leaden missile in his heart.

Then, as Mingo, closely seconded by the Ten Eycks, suddenly freshened his assault, after snatching up an enormous crowbar, with which he sent down all before him, Ensco saw his longed-for opportunity.

Darting through the staggering ruffians like a bolt, he dodged a dig from Vasco's poniard, and the next instant had Juan Martez in his tremendous embrace.

"Murderer of Grant Marston! you are mine, mine at last!"

But Juan was like an electric eel even in that crushing grasp, his eyes glowing like coals, the birthmark arrow standing out in startling distinctness on his ghastly cheek.

"He laughs who wins!" he gasped, and one arm was again free with the dagger in its clutch. "Kill me, if it is Fate's will, but I will bite and sting unto the last!"

"Will you so? No; for the hangman, Juan, for the hangman alone is this dainty morsel of your life!"

Just then, however, Vasco once more rushed upon the detective with uplifted knife.

There was no help for it. The latter had to disengage one arm with which to hurl him back, and then Juan succeeded in tearing himself free.

The fight was almost at an end, with fully half the pirates prostrate, the rest in panic, and no serious casualties whatever as yet on the part of the boarding-party.

"All's lost!" cried Juan. "Follow me who can!"

With that he leaped overboard, closely followed by Vasco and such others as were equal to the attempt.

"After them!" shouted the detective; "let not one escape!"

And then, while the remaining victors were tumbling into the pinnace, to pursue the swimming fugitives, he dashed below.

The cabin, with its saloon and state-rooms, was empty.

He rushed through the place, calling loudly but vainly upon his beloved's name.

There was no answer but the echoes—not a trace of either of the senora or her captive.

Whose voice had he then heard singing, if not the senora's?

It occurred to him with crushing significance that Vasco's voice was wonderfully like hers, and he also remembered—alas! when too late—to have heard from Inez that the young man was an adept in sweet and melancholy music.

"Yes; the incident of the yellow snake's appearance was no longer confirmatory—it might have been accidentally left behind in the senora's hurried desertion of the Ghost, perhaps hours, perhaps days before.

Yes; he confronted the fact that he had been self-deceived.

He struck his forehead.

But at that instant his foot touched a piece of paper, which rustled beneath its tread.

He snatched it up.

Yes; hope for a second time baffled, deception confirmed!

It was another message from Inez, the merest despairing line, but bearing a date that was two days old.

"Ensco:—She is taking me away once more—out of the steam-yacht that has been my temporary prison—out into the unknown—whither I know not!"

"INEZ."

This was in the saloon.

He reeled under the bitter disappointment, but staggered toward the companionway.

Another paper, crumpled and soiled, as if dropped by accident, and then inadvertently trampled under passing and repassing steps, attracted his dazed attention.

This he likewise took up and examined, though with flagging interest.

It seemed to be a pen-and-ink communication in Spanish.

He thrust it, together with Nessie's message, into his pocket, and staggered up the companionway.

His frantic search had not consumed three minutes, but it seemed to have lasted indefinitely.

The fresh upper air, however, restored him to himself.

The pinnace, crowded with men, was already in hot pursuit of the swimming fugitives, while Gaff and Starlight were just putting off in the cottager's skiff.

The detective fiercely hailed the latter.

Inez was still lost to him—the White Sibyl of Morona as yet beyond his vengeful grasp—but here was at least a next best satisfaction close at hand!

In another minute he was in the skiff, and it was hue and cry upon the miserable sinners, with a short shrift for the hindmost.

The pinnace had already overhauled and dragged two dripping wretches on board, and the skiff was close and eager behind, while an exclamation from Mr. Dago, who was looking back, diverted the purpose in hand.

"Great guns!" he cried, "look at that devil of a steam-launch!"

No need of a second bidding.

All eyes were at once fastened upon the extraordinary vessel indicated.

She had snapped or cut her anchor-line, spun around like a water-top, and, with her spectral ease and noiselessness, was heading out of the cove at her accustomed phenomenal speed.

"She is the devil, and no mistake!" gasped Dago. "You were below in her, sir?" and he turned to Ensco.

"Yes; and only to find her interior deserted," was the moody response. "However, I did not look in the engine-room."

Pursuit of the swimmers was about being resumed when another exclamation, this time from Tom Gaff, permanently interrupted the affair.

"Shiver my timbers!" he yelled, "look at the Seamew. She's sinking!"

It was true.

The gallant yacht's sail had been hastily brailed up at the time of the rush of her entire ship's company over upon the Ghost's deck, and now, the grapplings having been mysteriously cast off by the latter in her phantom-like retreat, the Seamew was unquestionably heeling over and fast settling down at the bows.

"Jago's work!" roared Ensco, at the same time ordering a recall from the pursuit. "The clever hound must have scuttled her before attacking us in the flank!"

So it proved, but fortunately the damage to the yacht was not irreparable.

The auger-hole in her bow was speedily plugged, and half an hour later the water was pumped out of her; though all agreed that she had had a close call, and that a brief delay in the discovery of her condition would have been fatal.

The two prisoners taken out of the water were unrecognized ruffians, both of whom died soon after being hoisted on deck by reason of injuries received in the initial fight; the remaining swimmers had made good their escape to the shore. With the exception of Jago's body, which was never found, the other sufferers of the fight, wounded or dead, had been carried away on the deck of the disappearing Ghost.

Such was the result.

Somewhat later, a joyous exclamation of the detective, called Mr. Dago into the Seamew's cabin, into which the former had stepped but a few moments before.

"What is it?" demanded Dago.

Ensco was waving the crumpled and stained letter in Spanish over his head.

"A clew! an unexpected clew!" he cried.

"To what—to Miss Delorme's whereabouts?"

"No; but the next best thing. A clew to the stolen jewel-chest!"

CHAPTER XXXI.

A SECRET DIVULGED.

THE detective quickly explained his possession of the letter, which he had just succeeded in translating.

"It is from Juan Martez to his mother, the senorina!" he exclaimed. "The date is on the day following the triple tragedy on this yacht!"

"How does it read?" inquired Mr. Dago.

"Listen. The letter is dated at Tompkinsville, Staten Island; I will translate its contents as well as I can to you."

And the detective accordingly did so to the following effect:

"MY WISE MOTHER:—

"I have carried out your profound plan to perfection. The troublesome old senor and two of his followers are in Paradise—or elsewhere. It was murderous work, but last night finished the job. Jewels intact. I have just returned from burying them at the extreme west end of Rockaway, in the spot you selected. The second of the outer reefs, cup-shaped, that are visible at low tide. We can carry them off with us in the Ghost when the excitement incident to the affair shall have blown over, together with our little Inez. Vasco did not intercept the accursed detective, who has reached the yacht to discover—defeat. Nevertheless, I should have scuttled the Seamew directly following the affair. Our river band continues faithful to the death. Will visit you in person to-morrow."

"JUAN."

Mr. Dago rubbed his hands.

"Nothing could be more opportune than this information," he exclaimed. "Don't you advise proceeding to Rockaway at once?"

"We must think it over. Are you familiar with the locality specified?"

"Fairly so. I have some information of those outlying reefs or ledges."

"And they are mostly under water?"

"Yes."

"A queer place to bury away a treasure!"

"A capital place, for all that. Why, that was where the mythical Captain Kidd treasure was first looked for years ago!"

"But what would prevent the recurring tides from washing even a heavy object, once buried there, out into deep water?"

"The cup-shaped character of the reefs, as alluded to in that letter."

"They are of rock then, and not sand-bars, like the adjoining island?"

"They are both."

"How is that?"

"The foundation of the reefs is rock, worn in

deep holes, or pockets. Into these the sand washes in and out from the neighboring beach with the ebb and flow of the tides, though they are mostly more or less filled up, which gives them the appearance of shifting bars, when visible at all."

"So!"

"Any heavy object, laid away down under the sandy covering into one of the deeper of those rocky pockets or cups, would be secure from the action of the sea for ages."

"As little time as possible should be lost in making an investigation there. Isn't that your opinion?"

"Of course," said Dago. "The senora may take a notion to transfer the treasure to the Ghost at any hour."

"Heavens! what if the launch should be already off on that errand?"

"Not very likely," said Dago, after reflecting. "In the first place, the senora is not now on board of her."

"No; that is a certainty. Beyond two or three men who must have remained secreted in her engine-room, from whence they could also work her steering apparatus, there could not have been a soul below decks during the fight. I explored everywhere else thoroughly."

"Well, her present flight cannot be to any great distance. That is settled. But the twins have escaped, and there is no telling how soon they may re-man her. Yes; there had best be the least possible delay in our seeking the jewel-chest's hiding-place at Rockaway Beach."

"Is the Ghost sufficiently large and staunch to make a sea voyage?"

"A short one, yes."

"As far as Truxillo, Honduras?"

"At this season, undoubtedly. It would be a pleasure voyage over summer seas."

"We shall then but pause long enough to dry-dock the Seamew, and after that start for the Rockaway reefs."

"That will answer; for the Ghost must need repairs far more than we. Our ram tore up her side badly."

"And in the interim, fresh word may be obtained of Inez. My possession of this letter must not be known beyond ourselves."

"Of course not."

While this conference had been going on the Seamew had been making the best of her way out through the neck of the inlet.

At its mouth the Ten Eyck brothers were put ashore, after being cordially thanked for their services, and the cottager's skiff was at the same time returned to him, on which occasion the detective did not forget the additional compensation that had been promised.

The Seamew finally was just bidding farewell to the thenceforth memorable waters of Deep Cove when she ran upon a cleverly planted torpedo, in the middle of the narrow channel.

There was a tremendous explosion, and the yacht lost her steel ram attachment, which was broken short off of its fastenings, but beyond that sustained no serious damage.

There was no doubt whatever that the torpedo had been placed in the channel by the desperadoes remaining on the Ghost.

After that, the Seamew reached the dock-yard usually devoted to her repairs, at the foot of an East-side New York street, without further interruption.

It was by this time past noon, and all the battle-worn ship's company of the gallant yacht were glad enough to seek the rest and repose of which they were in such great need.

For this purpose, Ensco repaired to the Marston residence, where he knew that Mrs. Twiggs would be glad enough to furnish him with accommodations, and which he had not visited for several days.

John, the old coachman, sorrowfully touched his hat to him as he was passing through the grounds.

There was no longer the old-time patrol duty kept up there, since neither of the precious Marston treasures—neither the jewel-chest nor the beautiful young mistress herself—was any longer there to be defended, but John continued to carry his heavy stick, perhaps more from habit than anything else.

"Any news, sir?" he asked.

The detective sadly shook his head, and vouchsafed a brief account of the recent exciting happenings.

"How is Mrs. Twiggs?" the detective then inquired.

The old servitor—he had been in the Marston employ long before Inez was born—sorrowfully shook his head in his turn.

"Fairly, sir, fairly enough in body; but in heart—in mind!"

A hopeless gesture completed the old man's sentence.

"Poor woman! that is only to be expected," said Ensco. "I shall do what I can to console her, though it can't be much, and I am almost heart-broken myself, besides being worn out."

"Ah, sir; these be hard times!" murmured John, "and I almost fear that we'll look long for better."

He was moving away with tears in his eyes, when the detective detained him.

"A moment more, John," said the latter.

"The patrol is no longer continued, I suppose?"

"Ah, no, Mr. Ensco! Where would be the use, sir?"

"True; but I wish that it might be renewed for to-night."

"What! you still have hope, then?"

"I never lose that, my man. You will attend to the matter? And Gilbert is still able and willing to share your watch?"

"That he is, your Honor! Trust me for the rest. I suppose it's yourself that will think of resting within?"

"That is just it. There is no telling, you know, whether I may not already have been tracked hither."

"True for you, sir. Any further orders, sir?"

"Yes. If Mingo and little Starlight shall have been sufficiently rested, they will be at the boat-landing for me at midnight."

"An' in that case your Honor would wish to be stirring."

"Yes."

"I'll see that you're awakened, sir. Trust it all to me."

After spending an hour or two in trying to console Mrs. Twiggs, who was little less than inconsolable, the detective at last sought his much needed rest, it being then about sunset.

Ensco had been given a pleasant room on the second floor, overlooking the front piazza.

He chanced to aken toward midnight, when several remarkable incidents occurred.

The moonlight was brightly flooding his apartment.

Presently something, apparently a pebble, flew through the open window, and dropped upon the floor.

Then there was a queer little cry in a woman's voice, followed by a half-smothered oath, from somewhere outside.

The detective sat in bed, and listened with his soul in his ears.

CHAPTER XXXII.

STRANGE HAPPENINGS.

THE sounds were repeated, followed by a rustling noise, as of some one pursuing another through the shrubbery.

After that, silence.

Ensco slipped out of bed, and stole to the window.

Nothing was visible on the grounds.

Then he sought and picked up the object that had dropped on the floor.

It was a scrap of paper weighted by a pebble.

"Try the hulk-palace again."

Such were the written words on the scrap of paper.

Scarcely had Ensco mastered them before there was a slight movement outside, as of some one trying to scale the piazza.

Obeing a sudden instinct, instead of again advancing to the window, he stole back to bed.

The bed was somewhat back in shadow, the rest of the room being brightly bathed in the moonlight.

He had just ensconced himself therein afresh, revolver in readiness, when the window was darkened by a stealthy human form.

Its slender gracefulness caused the detective's heart to leap.

Then when the figure's face was turned to the light, he could have cried out for joy.

It was the face of Juan Martez, murder in the eyes, a poniard in the clinched teeth.

The haggard face of a worn-out, desperate, but still murderously resolved, man.

The figure remained framed in the window for an instant, looking in as though to take its bearings thoroughly before entering.

The detective's right hand crept from under the sheet, secure in the shadow, and his revolver covered the midnight intruder's heart.

Should he shoot?

It was a hard struggle with his natural inclination, but he silently put aside the pistol out of his hand.

No; alive and for the hangman!

Such had been his iron determination, such it should remain.

But scarcely had the intruder's feet touched the floor than the detective was upon him with a tiger spring.

There was just time for the dagger to flash once uselessly aloft in the weird light when its owner was in that terrible, that adamant clutch.

A sort of muffled roar burst from Juan's lips, he gnashed his teeth, writhing his sinewy body like a serpent.

But in vain.

The detective gave a low, terrible laugh.

"At last and forever!" he muttered. "My murderous little Juan, I could love thee at this moment, thou art so close, so dear to me! It is thy doom."

But still there had been some struggling resistance, and it had brought Ensco back to the window.

Now there was a click, a muffled report, and a bullet grazed his ear.

To wheel, still clutching his prey, was but an instant's time for the detective.

Vasco was at the window, his revolver cocked for a second shot.

Ensco made an involuntary movement to one side as the second bullet sped.

That saved his life, but caused his victim's cheek—the left cheek—to be redly furrowed by the speeding shot, as a companion scar to the arrow birth-mark on the other cheek.

But yet again was Vasco's ready revolver on the cock, a fit accompaniment to the murderous laughter in its wielder's eyes.

The detective was compelled to reach out and grasp the weapon.

This enabled Juan to writhe out of his grasp by a renewed effort, suddenly exerted.

Then the detective was sent reeling backward by a flush blow full in the throat.

When he recovered, brief as had been the respite afforded, the twins had vanished.

Ensco threw on his clothes with a baffled, savage disappointment at heart, such as he had never felt before.

As he finished dressing, John's voice was heard calling him from below.

"Is there anything wrong, sir?" the coachman called up as the detective again appeared at the window.

"I should say so!" was the answer.

"Mingo and the lad are at the landing, sir."

"All right, John! Where are you last from?"

"The landing, sir."

"Directly before that, I mean."

"Talking to a wild woman, sir."

"What?"

"Yes, sir; but she's gone, now. That's what I wanted to ask you about when they signaled me at the landing."

"Oh!"

"Shall you come down by the side-door, sir?"

"No; this will answer."

And the detective was out over the piazza roof and down at the patrol's side in short order.

"Why did you first ask me if anything was wrong?" he demanded.

"I was hurrying up from the landing, sir, when I thought I heard a couple of smothered-like reports."

"Ah! then you saw no one?"

"No, sir; only the woman. Bless me, sir! was there anything else? Have you seen any one?"

"It is no matter. Now about this woman, tell me of her." And the detective led the way a little further from the house.

"Ah, sir, such a woman! She came upon me all breathless, saying some one was chasing her, but I could see no one."

"What more did she say?"

"That she was a friend of yours, and had thrown a piece of paper containing important intelligence into your window."

"Oho!"

"She wasn't certain that she had chucked it through the right window. That was why she accosted me, apart from being scared by the fancied pursuit."

"Fancied?"

"I thought so, sir; though she was willing to swear that a man with a knife had made for her the instant after she had thrown the paper."

"Ah!"

"But she was awfully glad when I told her that she had chanced on the right window—your room-window, sir."

"What became of the woman?"

"She was so earnest and wild-like, and begged so hard, that I let her go without any more questioning. Directly after that Mingo's signal took me down to the landing."

"But what was the woman like? Describe her."

John did so, after his fashion.

Nevertheless, the detective, much to his mystification, recognized by the description—Mrs. Emroled.

"That will do, John. I shall not return to my room, so you may consider your patrol duty at an end."

Then the detective hurried down to the landing, where Mingo and Starlight were awaiting him in a hired boat.

"To Hunt's Point, direct!" was his order as he got on board.

But no sooner had they shoved off than a woman was seen beckoning to them from under some trees at the opposite side of the grounds.

It proved to be Mrs. Emroled, who was taken on board at her earnest solicitation.

"I want you to land me at Bowery Bay, sir" said she. "The ferry that brought me to this side is no longer running, it is so late."

The detective nodded, and gave the necessary order.

She had settled down at his side in the stern, on his making room for her.

"I see you must have got my missive, sir."

"I did, Mrs. Emroled, thank you!"

"Oh, if it may only lead to something!"

"How did you obtain the information that inspired the line you sent me, madam?"

"From my husband."

"And he?"

"Is now lying at the point of death, I fear."

"You exaggerate."

"No, no; I only wish I did."

"How could you leave him, then?"

"It was only at his express injunction—in order to convey the message to you."

"Where did he obtain his information?"

"He wouldn't tell me. But I suspect it was from a strange ruffian whom he killed in a desperate struggle last evening in the wood back of our cabin."

"H! the fellow had attacked him?"

"Yes, sir. My husband, before mastering him, received the injuries that I fear must cost him his life."

"And the ruffian?"

"I think he must have become conscience-stricken just before his own death, and then imparted to George the information he insisted on my conveying to you."

"This is all very extraordinary."

"Oh, yes, sir! but do make them row fast. I fear my husband may die before my return."

"The man and boy are doing their best, ma'am. If there were more oars, I would take a pair myself. Is your husband alone in the cabin?"

"The physician may be with him by this time. He was to have come at midnight."

"Try to compose yourself, ma'am."

"I am trying, but it is so hard."

"How did Emroled know that I would be found at the Marston residence?"

"He did not know; we took the chance of finding you there."

"A fortunate chance. Did he not also send a verbal message?"

"Only to beg that you would bring Inez to us the first thing, should you succeed in effecting her rescue. Oh, you will do so, you will, sir, will you not?"

She clasped her hands in an agony of entreaty.

"Do compose yourself, Mrs. Emroled," said the detective, after a pause. "That shall be done."

"Oh, thank you, sir, thank you!"

"Nonsense! Now satisfy my curiosity on a certain point."

"Oh, of course, sir."

"Directly after tossing the weighted message into my room window, were you really pursued, as you asserted to the coachman?"

"Oh, truly, sir!"

"By whom?"

"By a terrible-looking young man, with a knife in his hand, and a red mark on his cheek. He disappeared as I ran out of the shrubbery toward the coachman."

"Ah, that will do."

"Were you in danger, sir? Had I interrupted him in a contemplated crime?"

"It matters not now. All's well."

Nothing more was said until Bowery Beach was reached, in the vicinity of the Emroled cabin.

Ensco assisted Mrs. Emroled ashore with the respect that he might have shown to a dis-crowned and unfortunate queen.

"You won't forget, sir?" and she again clasped her hands. "You will bring her to us first?"

"My word is passed, madam. God speed you, and may your husband be found in better trim."

She darted away among the trees.

"For Hunt's Point!" repeated the detective on resuming his place in the boat.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

SUNSHINE AT LAST.

SOON after starting afresh, it occurred to Ensco to ask about the Seamew.

"She'll be all right to-morrow, boss," said Starlight, in answer to the inquiry. "Mr. Dago will have her at the Astoria anchorage by noon."

"That is well."

"I say, boss," continued the boy, after a long silence, only broken by the dip of the oars.

"Well, my lad?"

"What was the matter with Mammy Emroled, that she wouldn't hardly notice me to-night?"

"She was too much occupied."

"I should say so—gaddin' round the river-fronts at this time of night! Of course, I ain't nothin' to her, an' never was. Oh, no."

"Your 'mammy' is in great trouble," said the detective, gravely.

"What about, sir?"

"She fears her husband is dying."

Starlight dropped his oars to burst into tears. The Emroleds had reared him from infancy.

Greatly touched by the lad's exhibition of feeling, Ensco did his best to comfort him, and with some success.

A new day was affording its hints as the boat rounded the northern end of Ward's Island, and thence headed in a straight line for Hunt's Point.

As the hulk drew in sight, the detective fastened his eyes upon it hungrily, fiercely.

Success was not to be snatched from him this time, he was certain of it.

The shrewdness of the senora in returning with her captive to the hulk, directly after it should be found apparently deserted by her for

good, struck him as something little short of sublime.

That is, on the supposition that he would find such to have been the case, of which he now felt there could no longer be any doubt.

Yes; her astuteness in such a move was to be admired.

None other could have so much insured her security, or have been so apt to disarm suspicion as to her whereabouts.

As they drew nearer the hulk, it appeared, externally, more battered, deserted and forlorn-looking than ever before.

But the detective was not again to be deceived by appearances.

With torpedo-remembrances still vivid in his mind, he cautioned his oarsmen to the utmost prudence, and softly guided the way into the narrow water-space between the hulk and the shore.

Here his first movement was to noiselessly unship the gang-plank, and set it floating.

He had scarcely done this, and was moving stealthily along, when movements and voices were distinguished as coming from within the hulk.

The early morning light was as yet but semi-darkness.

He held up his hand, his followers sat in the boat like statues.

The sounds increased, but were still vague and meaningless.

The trio in the boat were in the shadow of the hulk's prow, and between it and the shore.

At this juncture Mingo silently drew out the boat, so that a better view of the river was commanded, and then slowly pointed with his hand.

Something was looming up over the water, a vague bulk in the thickness of the gloaming.

What was it?

Then the Ghost made her presence evident.

She was approaching the hulk, but more laboriously, and with less of the gliding, mysterious ease, than had heretofore distinguished her.

"Aha!" thought the detective; "your ghost-ship still aches from that dig of the Seamew's in your black ribs, and you are also short-manned. So much the better!"

As the steam-launch, nevertheless, drew up to the outer side of the hulk, the noises in the latter interior resolved themselves into hurrying steps on the companionway.

Ensco made a sign, by which Starlight remained in the skiff, while Mingo followed his own example in peeping over the hulk's deck.

The next instant the senora, followed by Inez, made her appearance at the top of the companionway.

The detective recognized them both, notwithstanding that their figures were much enveloped in wrappings.

The senora made an impatient sign to the one man that was visible at the Ghost's gangway.

"Nearer!" she called out in Spanish. "*Car-amba!* how can we jump that chasm?"

"I'll throw out a plank," replied the man, in the same tongue. "Our side is badly ripped, and we dare not come nearer."

"How many of you?" she demanded, while he was stooping over the plank.

"Only the engineer and steward, besides myself."

At this instant the detective and Mingo bounded on the deck.

The senora uttered a snarl, Inez a scream of delight.

Then Ensco had seized the latter, pressed his lips to her forehead, and passed her over to Mingo, while he himself made a spring for the White Sibyl.

But the latter was not so seizable as her whilom captive, by reason of her bosom companions, the snakes, having taken the alarm.

In fact, a dozen or more hideous flat heads were already darting out from amid the folds of her garments, she seemed sheathed in an atmosphere of angry hissings, and moreover her long, gleam-lit dagger glistened in her desperate hand.

"Quick, Jim—Farrish!" she screamed. "To the rescue, or we are lost!"

The man at the plank—the desperado launch-captain—was at her side in an instant, revolver in hand.

But the detective dashed him aside, evaded the lunge of the senora's poniard, and, in another instant, had got her in his steel-like clutch, despite her serpent guardians.

"Hag! foul witch!" he growled; "your time is come. The woman-serpent is at last helpless in the athlete's clutch!"

She was a powerful woman, and was still struggling demoniacally.

"Never!" she gasped through her gnashing teeth. "Still, as of old, are you subject to my power!"

He felt a dozen stinging sensations on his face and hands, and knew that he was as repeatedly bitten by the reptiles, but it only nerved his enormous strength afresh.

The next moment he hurled her through the air.

Then, merely perceiving that she fell in a heap on the deck of the Ghost, which was

now sheering off yet further from the hulk in a crippled, uncertain manner, he wheeled to confront the anticipated onset of Farrish.

But that ruffian was already writhing in the mighty grip of the negro Colossus, who had thrust Inez behind him to meet the former's rush.

Jim Farrish was a trained desperado, of immense physique and bulldog courage; but he was no more than a wooden effigy in Mingo's tremendous grasp.

"Give me a show, can't you?" snarled out the ruffian, with an oath.

"Dat's what I se gwine ter do, boss," was the panted reply. "Hyar yer go!"

With that the launch-captain was whirled aloft and out over the intervening water-space, as if shot out of a catapult.

He struck the side of the launch with a force that must have broken half the bones in his body, and then fell into the water, a motionless, mutilated mass.

A man had appeared upon the Ghost's deck and helped the senora to her feet.

Now the vessel quickly rounded out, and steamed away.

Inez was ere this sobbing and moaning in her lover's arms.

Ensco gave orders to his followers to remain on the lookout, and then drew her with him down the companionway.

"Are we alone here?" he asked, after striking a light, and looking around him in the saloon they had entered.

"Yes, yes; there was no one else here, and she will not return. She was on the point of abandoning this place forever. My love, my darling! But how strangely you look!"

"Oh, Inez! I fear we meet but to separate forever."

"Heavens! what mean you?"

"Look at my hands, my face! I am hopelessly stung by her accursed serpents."

Inez gave a cry, but it was one of relief.

"Their bites are painful, but harmless. Wait!" She ran to a drawer, and returned with a little cup full of a greenish-colored paste. "Here, let me apply this ointment. There; is it not a relief?"

"Wonderful! The pain is gone already. She had had the poison-fangs of the creatures extracted, then?"

"Yes; or she would never have handled them so recklessly. They would bite her at times, though, and then she used this paste as a relief. You are sure the pain is all gone?"

"Yes."

"Then it will not return."

She put the cup away, and once more melted in her lover's embrace, but without the accompanying sobs and tears.

Joy, pure rapture and thanksgiving, were now in the ascendant.

"Did the senora treat you cruelly?" asked Ensco, when these transports were somewhat subsided.

"No; beyond depriving me of my liberty and never letting me out of her sight, she was not unkind."

"You must tell me the details of your captivity at once."

"Now and here?"

"Yes. After that there is much for you to do in my company—that is, if you are equal to it."

"I am equal to anything now! What is in store for me?"

"A visit."

"A visit?"

"Yes; and a revelation."

"Come now; whither must I then go with you? Direct to dear Auntie Twiggs? Is she fallen sick, then?"

"No; full of suspense and anxiety on your account, but no worse. After you shall have told me your story, which will doubtless quiet your excitement, you must first accompany me to the cabin of the Emroleds."

"That strange couple?"

"It is solely to their information that you owe your rescue. Besides, I have promised, and Mr. Emroled is probably on his death-bed."

"Let us start at once, then. I can tell you my story on the way."

"That is far the best," said the detective.

"To tell the truth, I am not comfortable in this uncanny place."

When seated together in the stern of the open boat, with Mingo and Starlight once more at the oars, Inez told the story of her adventures.

After being so unceremoniously gagged and dragged into the thicket, during the attack upon the boat house, she discovered her captor to be the launch captain, who had shortly before her rescue met his death at Mingo's hands.

By this man she had been hurried into a small boat, in waiting not far away, and thence taken on board the Ghost.

There the senora had received her, and without further ado she had been carried away to the hulk at Hunt's Point.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

INEZ TELLS HER STORY.

"How did the senora receive you?" asked the detective.

"With ceremonial sternness at first," replied Inez. "She said that she was my natural guardian. If obedient to her wishes, I would find her indulgent, kind and amiable; if untractable, I would find her just the reverse, and she would make me very unhappy."

"Did you temporize with her?"

"Not at first. I was far too incensed and indignant. I not only defied her, but boldly taxed her with being privy to my grandfather's murder and the robbery of the jewels."

"Ah! and then?"

"She flew in a dreadful rage at first, and I really feared she would kill me in her fury. She controlled herself, however, after a time, and affected to treat my charges with contempt. 'You are a headstrong, foolish girl,' said she. 'By and by, you will see that it is to your interest to conciliate me and be subservient to the future I have in store for you.'

"I asked her what that might be. She said that, after she had arranged a certain business in this vicinity, she would carry me with her to her mountain hacienda in Honduras, where I should marry Vasco—who had fallen deeply in love with me—and be very, very happy for the remainder of my days."

"Indeed! and did she vouchsafe to explain this pressing business that delayed such a joyful consummation?"

"Partly, in answer to my sarcastic inquiry."

"What was the business?"

"To first assure herself of her sons' safety from pursuit, by accomplishing *your* destruction."

"Ah! my death was indispensable to that end, eh?"

"Yes; she frankly acknowledged that so long as you lived she and her sons could not count upon a moment of security."

"Well, anything more?"

"Yes; that blissful object accomplished, she would only have to take on board the Ghost a certain buried treasure, after which it would be 'Ho; for Honduras!' with never a care or uneasiness but might be left behind."

The detective knitted his brows.

"God willing, we'll forestall her in that business too!" he muttered.

"Was it the stolen jewel-chest she referred to, think you?"

"Undoubtedly."

"But you cannot know where it is secreted."

"That I do, my darling! And our first business, after this visit to the Emroled cottage, shall be to go in quest of it."

Inez clasped her hands.

"The jewel-treasure—our treasure!" she exclaimed. "Can it be possible?"

"It is true." And he related the manner of his obtaining the information.

"That letter of Juan's!" she cried. "It is strange that the senora should have been so careless as to lose it. She was exceedingly jealous of her correspondence."

"Now let me hear you continue your story, Inez."

"Well, after our arrival at the hulk, the senora introduced me to her serpent pets, and in other ways so terrified and humbled me, that I gave up my defiant attitude. After that, she was much kinder to me. I soon found that her object was to elude pursuit by not remaining with me long in one place. Our departure from the hulk was as hurried and unexpected as our arrival there. I was barely given time to secretly scrawl that first note of mine to you, which I see you must have received."

Ensco nodded, and she proceeded:

"Again on board the Ghost, we went to a secluded inlet somewhere up the Hudson. Juan and Vasco were then with the steam-yacht, together with a large crew of desperate men. But they were very careful about not showing themselves, and to an outsider the Ghost must have seemed as unaccountably deserted yet alert as it had to me on that first occasion when her first appearance so terrified us all. During this time I also got an idea of the stringent regulations by which this air of mystery and ghostliness was so thoroughly maintained."

"I can imagine all that," said the detective.

"Tell me if you were annoyed by either Vasco or Juan during your last sojourn on the Ghost."

"Not to any great extent, though Vasco persisted in singing for his mother and me a good deal. I am compelled to say that he has a most exquisite melancholy voice, which, strangely enough, likewise bears a strong resemblance to his mother's."

"I discovered that, to my cost," interposed the detective, a little bitterly. "But go on, my darling!"

"Besides," continued Inez, "we were not long enough in the Ghost for even Vasco to make many advances toward me. At dusk of the evening following our arrival in the secluded inlet I have alluded to, the senorina gave me a glass of wine, saying: 'My child, I want you to drink this. It will support you over a rough journey that I find we must set out upon without another hour's delay.'

"Much as I feared the senora, I was quite certain that she did not desire my death, and so drank the proffered wine without demur."

"Instead of supporting me, the draught al-

most instantly threw me into a sort of speechless trance.

"In this condition I was dimly conscious of being taken to the shore, of getting with the senora into a coach, of reaching some town, of crossing a great river—doubtless the Hudson—of a brief railroad journey; and when I recovered my normal senses at last I was once more in the hulk."

"Ah! she had drugged you to speechlessness, to prevent your appealing to outsiders for protection against her *en route*."

"Yes; so I thought afterward. But before the wine had quite accomplished its deadening effect, I had found time to scribble another line for you and drop it in the Ghost's cabin."

"I found it, at the same time that the letter in Spanish so opportunely came to light," said Ensco.

"Well, but little more is to be said. After that the senora and I were altogether alone in her hulk-palace. But I had even less chance for escape than before."

"She watched me as a cat would a mouse. She was jealous of my slightest movement. And I am sure that she must have secretly given me a sleeping potion regularly before resting, to make sure that I would not make an attempt to escape during her own slumber."

"I had almost given up all hope of being rescued by you, and grew very despondent. But last night at midnight the senora awoke me. She bid me to make myself ready, as the Ghost might call for us at any hour, and we would never come back to the hulk again."

"The senora seemed restless and anxious—what I had never remarked in her before. She even shed tears at the thought of leaving so much fine furniture and other property behind as were in the hulk."

"I asked her why she could not take her property with her on the Ghost. She said there would not be time. Her manner became more and more anxious and depressed as the time wore away without the launch putting in an appearance."

"Ha! she must have got secret news of our battle in Deep Cove. She felt that she was getting at the end of her rope, and the sensation was doubtless unpleasant!"

"A battle?"

"Yes; I shall tell you of that presently. Did she also seem to be anxious about her sons?"

"Yes; terribly so. But at last she seemed to be aware of the Ghost's approach. And she hurried me up the companionway. You know the rest."

The detective now had his story to tell in his turn.

When it was concluded the boat had reached its destination.

"I say, Miss Delorme," said little Starlight, as Inez stepped ashore. "Ain't you goin' to do anything more than jest nod and say Howdy to a feller what once was your guide and perceptor?"

The young girl laughed, for her old buoyancy of spirits was almost restored to her by this time.

"I don't know about that, Starlight," she replied, stopping to pat the boy's brown little face.

"What more should I do?"

"Nothing now, miss!" and, rubbing the spot she had patted, he kissed his palm. "No feller could ask for any more sweetness than that."

She laughed again, nodded brightly to Mingo, and accompanied Ensco in the path leading up to the cabin.

"Under what other strange circumstances was I in this neighborhood once before?" she exclaimed. "I do hope that we shall find Mr. Emroled in better case than you said."

Then she noticed how grave her lover had grown, for it saddened him to think of how soon her sunniness of feeling might be overshadowed.

"What is the matter, Douglass?" she asked.

"Yes; I am going to address you only by your true name hereafter—Douglass, Douglass, tender and true! Why are you so shockingly sober? Ah, I remember—I am to be treated to a revelation, you said."

They were now near the cabin.

He merely drew her hand through his arm, saying, "May you be able to support it!" and then they entered the door side by side.

Emroled lay on the couch, apparently near his end, his wife kneeling at his side.

But at the sight of the beautiful young girl the flush of life seemed to return to the dying man's face, and his eyes to brighten with a wild new hope.

Mrs. Emroled had sprung to her feet, her face the index of conflicting emotions, her breast in tumult.

"My child!" she cried, seizing the girl's hands. "Come, be quick! He is dying—he would have you kiss him before he passes away!"

Emroled was also stretching out his arms to her with an imploring gesture.

Inez was drawing back, bewildered, frightened, but mostly indignant.

Kiss him—a perfect stranger, or little more than a stranger to her—kiss him, even when dying!

Was the woman mad, were they both mad? What could it mean?"

She turned inquiringly, half-resentfully, to the detective.

The latter was very pale.

"Go to them, Inez," he faltered. "It is meet, it is just that you should. They are your parents, child!"

Her parents!

It was too much.

She reeled and fell.

CHAPTER XXXV.

A REVELATION.

BUT it was in her own mother's arms that Inez fell when overcome by that unexpected shock.

It was her own mother's pained, long-suffering eyes that first met hers when she again opened them, with a dim realization of the astounding revelation that had been made.

"Speak to me, my darling, my daughter!" cried the woman wildly. "Tell me that you did not faint with shame, with mortification, that you had found your parents in us!"

For a first answer, Inez impulsively threw her arms about the withered neck, drew the poor lips down, and kissed them tenderly, thankfully.

It was more than had been hoped for. The woman wept such tears of joy as she had never known before, and there was also a sound of weeping from the couch.

"Shame! mortification!" repeated the girl, rising. "Wherefore anything but joy and ecstasy for me. I cannot understand—it all seems strange and dream-like. But he"—indicating her lover with a grateful gesture—"has said it. Hence it must be true; and it needs but that to be everything that is holy and sweet!"

Then she hastened to throw herself beside the couch, her lips were pressed to the marbling brow of its occupant, and the mother hovered over both while the trembling hands of the dying man wandered over the lovely bended head.

"Ensco, quick, come here!" cried Delorme at last. "Justify me in her sight—tell her my story so that I too can hear you before I am gone!"

The detective had come to the foot of the bed.

"Listen to the story of your father's wrongs, Inez," said he. "Your mother's father—your grandfather, Captain Marston—was at first satisfied that she should marry your father, George Delorme. But the latter had been loved previously by a woman who swore to wreck the happiness of the young couple. That woman was she whom you have known as the Senorina Zarapatta Martez."

"Though herself married to a worthy gentleman, and already the mother of the twins, Juan and Vasco, she had wedded for money and position, and the thought of her secret first choice becoming the husband of another turned that former love to undying hate, and she succeeded but too well in keeping her infernal oath of vengeance."

"As Captain Marston's niece, she readily became a guest in his house."

"Your father and mother were also living with the captain, and you were then but a few months old."

"In a few weeks after the young senora's arrival there was a tremendous forgery perpetrated upon the Gotham Bank, in which Captain Marston was heavily interested, besides being one of the directors."

"Funds deposited therein to the amount of nearly a million, belonging to the first Honduran Revolutionary Party, of which General Martez was the chief, were paid out on a series of checks or drafts that subsequently proved to be clever forgeries."

"The bank was already in difficulties, and the making good of the amount paid out on the forgeries completed its misfortunes."

"It failed, with great financial loss to its directors and stockholders. Your grandfather, especially, Inez, was for the time being ruined. Beggary stared him in the face, and he was furious."

"It was at this critical time that participation in the forgeries was seemingly brought home to your father, George Delorme."

"The evidence against him, though subsequently proved to have been manufactured, was sufficient to satisfy a jury of his guilt."

He was convicted, and sentenced to a severe term of imprisonment. The old captain was cold and deadly in his animosity to his son-in-law.

"The young wife was forbidden to ever mention her husband's name, on pain of being driven forth upon the world; and the Senora Martez returned to her tropical home, secretly rejoicing in the success of her plot; for it was solely owing to perjured testimony, secretly secured by her wealth, that the unfortunate Delorme had been consigned to a felon's cell."

"Your scarcely less unfortunate mother lived, suffered and hoped."

"At last a gleam of relief was hers."

"When you were little more than three years old, your father, George Delorme, effected his

escape from Sing Sing, and successfully eluded all efforts to recapture him."

"Your mother, however, was in communication with him, and lost no time in announcing to her father that she was determined to resume relations with her husband—which, by the way, she had never considered more than temporarily interrupted."

"The captain swore that in such case he would disown her, and she should never more be child of his; but that he would, nevertheless, treat her child as his joy and heir, on condition that both parents would abandon every claim, and consider the child as dead to them."

"Your mother knew that her father would keep his word, and she made her choice."

"She sacrificed her affection for her child, and joined her husband."

"From that day to this have the faithful, sorrowing couple buried themselves in this rude cabin, secure in their toilsome obscurity and in their assumed name of Emroled, which is nothing more than a reversed spelling of Delorme."

The detective came to a pause, but the dying man raised his hand supplicatingly.

"Don't forget the vindication!" he gasped, with pitiful eagerness. "Don't forget that for her, Ensco."

"I would not have forgotten it, old friend," said the detective, gently; and he then went on: "Within a few years of your father's escape from prison, Inez, and while you were yet very young, it all came out that your father had suffered a cruel and irreparable injustice."

"One of the false-witnesses, who had been suborned by the young senora's money, through a Spanish agent of hers, made a dying confession to that effect, which was published."

"The confession was speedily confirmed by various circumstances."

"The newspapers took up the subject. George Delorme's innocence was made apparent. Had he remained in prison, he would have been speedily restored to liberty by legal methods, probably with some sort of reparation."

"But injustice had made a bitter misanthrope of the man."

"He had, moreover, found a species of balm in his poverty and retreat, and resolved to remain dead to the world. His wife cleaved to him."

"They were confirmed in this resolve, notwithstanding that it separated them irrevocably from their child, by the attitude of Captain Marston himself."

"Just and generous in other things, he refused to believe in his son-in-law's innocence, and remained implacably prejudiced to the last."

"In fact, this was a warp, and a most unpleasant one, in the old pilot's character that I have never been able to understand."

"I have sometimes thought that he was hardened to this continued injustice through his doting love for you, who had become the apple of his eye; and that he dreaded a resumption of decent relations with your parents lest it might separate you from him."

"At all events, he remained deaf to the appeals of justice and of nature. Your parents accepted the continued hardship, though it was breaking their hearts, day by day and inch by inch, and the stern, unnatural old man remained, on this point, relentless and immovable to the end of his tragic death."

"Since then your parents, acting upon my advice, have still kept silent, intending to remain so, even to the further violence to their instincts and their longings, until your grandfather's murder should have been avenged, and you yourself relieved of the suspense and unhappiness attendant upon the uncertainty and mystery of the affair."

"Fate has willed it that the revelation should be hastened."

"I should have mentioned that even General Martez, who was an honorable but over-adventurous man, became greatly alienated from his wife through the detestable part he believed her to have been guilty of."

"Indeed and finally, I know of my own knowledge, that this mainly prompted him to commit to your grandfather's charge the jewel-treasure whose possession has proven so fatal and so tragic."

"True, its transfer was intrusted to the senorina herself, but under safeguards that she could not violate; and it was only after the general's death that she was enabled to bestir herself toward the commission of the terrible crimes that followed."

"Inez, the story is finished. Child and parents are reunited at last, inseparably reunited, let us hope."

"Yes, inseparably!" gasped Delorme. "I feel it, I know! Death steps in, but his separating touch is only apparent, not real. Marguerita, my wife! Inez, my child!"

"Ah, he is dying!" sobbed the girl, wildly.

"My father! my father!"

But even as she implored the world-worn and suffering spirit passed from its earthly tenement.

After the first transports of grief had in a measure subsided, Inez insisted that she should remain in the cabin until such time as her mother could leave it with her.

But Mrs. Delorme would not permit this; neighbors were sent for who consented to share her watch over the dead; and the detective at last succeeded in leading the weeping girl away.

It was but natural that Inez should feel her father's loss less deeply than had it occurred after she had more fully realized the restored paternal relationship.

She turned to Ensco, with brimming yet still curious eyes, when they were once more in the open air.

"And what must be *your* strange history, my beloved," she murmured, "when you seem to have mixed so mysteriously and intimately in that of me and mine?"

"Though brief as strange, my darling," he gravely replied, "it must yet for a short time remain untold."

He might have said more, but just then there was a warning whistle, and little Starlight appeared in the path they were pursuing.

"Hist, boss!" he ejaculated, in a hoarse whisper. "The game's on foot again!"

"What is it?" demanded the detective.

"The Ghost is a-cruisin' near. Mingo thinks she may be lookin' for the twin devils to take 'em aboard."

"Ha! Where is Mingo and the boat?"

"Down in hidin' near the boat-house what was gutted and burned. It's in among them willows. I'll show you."

"No," said the detective, after a slight pause.

"I know the spot. Starlight, run into the cabin. Afterward you can find means to rejoin us."

"What's up, boss?"

"Poor Mr. De—Emroled is dead."

A lump rose in the boy's throat.

"He was a father to me, boss," he half-sobbed.

"Thank you, boss!" And he hurried away.

"I shall go with you," said Inez.

Ensco hesitated.

"There may be fresh danger."

"No matter; if I cannot remain with my mother, my place is at your side."

When they reached the spot where Mingo had concealed the boat, the negro was found covertly studying the movements of the Ghost, which had come to a pause just off the point.

"See!" said he. "Dere's her small-boat, Marse Rowlock, loafin' up an' down, back an' forth, jest before de ole boat-house. Oh, I knows it, Marse Rowlock, I feels it in de bones!"

"What is it you feel and know?"

"Dat some of dem debbils is a-hidin' somewhere hyarabouts, boss, an' the ole she-debbil am gwineer pick 'em up, if possible. Dere! what did I done tell yer, boss?"

A man was here seen to wade out to the small boat, and climb into her.

"Ha! You are right," exclaimed the detective. "Come with me, Mingo!"

CHAPTER XXXVI.

A CAPTURE.

INEZ also accompanied them, and they crept around the curve of the bay, under cover of the trees and undergrowth, to a point close under the ruins of the boat-house, whence the Ghost's small boat was visible close at hand, the steam-launch herself lying a short distance further out.

The senora's solitary figure was the only thing of life visible on the yacht's deck.

But her eyes seemed to be fastened anxiously on the shore-line and the hesitating movements of the boat.

The latter contained but one oarsman and the man who had waded out to her, both foreign-looking men whom Ensco and his companions failed to recognize.

"Hold on, Marse Rowlock!" whispered Mingo. "Dere's more to come yet—I feel it in de bones. Gorry! off it might be dem twin-debbils, an' we could get our hooks on 'em at dis last minute!"

"Too good to hope for, I am afraid," said the detective. "But I can understand how some of the fugitives from the Deep Cove affair might have made their way back here as affording them a temporary security. Still, that Juan and Vasco should have done so is more than I can believe."

Hardly had he spoken before the first-named twin, Juan, broke cover from close at hand, and was the next instant running out through the shallow water like a hunted deer.

Without waiting for permission, Mingo was after him in an instant, with a whoop and a yell.

Ensco was about to follow when Inez laid a touch upon his arm.

"Look!"

She was pointing through the underwood to Vasco, who, seeing that his brother was being pursued, had come to a startled pause at the water's edge, just under the shadow of the same thicket from which Juan had just emerged.

Both young men wore a desperate and hunted air.

While still hesitating at the water's edge, Vasco suddenly drew his revolver and leveled it at his brother's gigantic pursuer.

But before it could be discharged the Harbor Detective was upon him with a panther bound.

There was a desperate struggle, the young

Honduran seeming gifted with a desperate strength that was little short of superhuman; while Mingo had almost overtaken Juan, who seemed to be partly dazed, about midway to the yawl.

The senora saw it all.

Inez could plainly mark her excited movements up and down the yacht's deck, and could guess the agony of maternal suspense that inspired them.

It was like a tigress witnessing a murderous attack upon her beloved cubs, and she wounded, or helpless in the meshes of the hunter's snare.

The detective had finally succeeded in overmastering his prisoner, and snapping a pair of handcuffs on his wrists.

But at that instant there was a shot from the yawl, and Mingo was seen to come to a staggering pause.

A moment later, Juan, after hesitating whether to return to his brother's aid or continue his flight alone, was seen to clamber wearily into the boat.

The latter then pulled back to the Ghost without delay, notwithstanding that the senora was frenziedly shrieking her protest against the abandonment of Vasco to his fate.

Shortly after this, the Ghost steamed out of sight, Juan and the two other men being last observed on her deck, apparently doing their utmost to subdue the transports of the enraged senora.

In the mean time, as Inez came hurrying to his side, Ensco had completed Vasco's subjection, and Mingo was slowly staggering back through the shallows toward the group.

The latter, however, suddenly came to a pause, and, dropping to his knees, plunged his woolly head repeatedly in the water.

After this, much to the astonishment of his friends, he came trotting to the shore, with his vigor apparently altogether restored.

"Gorry, Marse Rowlock!" he exclaimed, with his champion grin; "I done t'ought I war done gone in, shuah. But look!" he exhibited his ear, which was slightly bleeding. "It war de wind ob de bullet, an' dat am de fact!"

"You are extremely fortunate, Mingo," said Ensco, heartily, while Inez also congratulated him on his escape. "See; we have one prisoner, at all events."

Mingo looked down upon the helpless Vasco, who had, however, by this time put on a reckless and indifferent air, and then shook his head.

"Ah, but dat udder one, he war de king-pin ob de pair, Marse Rowlock," he murmured. "I'd hev got him, shuah, but fur dat bullet! Oh, gorry, gorry! to t'ink dat Mingo war knocked out by jess a breaf ob air—by de wind ob a bullet! I'se 'shamed ob yer, Mingo! I'se 'shamed ob you from dis time fort', I is!"

Nevertheless, he cheerfully carried the prisoner to the boat, all the party got on board, including Starlight, who had returned from the cabin, his eyes red with weeping, and the prow was next headed for the Marston grounds at the foot of Eighty-sixth street.

"Thank Heaven! it is broad, sunny daylight, with plenty of river-craft in sight," said Ensco to Inez. "It is not likely that any accident or interception can rob us of such prey as we have succeeded in securing."

Low as he spoke, Vasco, who was lying bound not far away, had overheard the words.

"That is true, Ensco!" he cried out gayly; "and I suppose you are in sympathy with the old saying, 'Better half a loaf than no bread.' Inez, my dear cousin! do you remember the last pretty song I sung for you? *Carajo!* I am still in tune, if you say the word."

No attention was vouchsafed him, but he, nevertheless, did begin to sing; and when handed over to the police, was as blithe and jocular with them as they were carrying him off to the prison confinement which he might not permanently quit, save to meet a felon's death.

Having dispatched Mingo and Starlight to carry word to Mr. Dago, Ensco lost no time in hurrying into the mansion, where the lost one found was already being overwhelmed by the congratulations of the household.

Mrs. Twiggs was in an ecstasy of tears, while the joy of the young girls' Cockney maid-in-waiting was especially demonstrative.

A little later, when Ensco and Inez were alone, the former signified his willingness to tell her his history.

"Though I may appear much younger," he began, "I was born in New York thirty-nine years ago. So, I am nearly, if not quite, double your age, my darling." And he looked at her with a slight shade of anxiety in his inquiring gaze. "Does not that make me seem very ancient to you?"

Her soft hand stole into his.

"I would, assuredly, not have you a day younger, Douglass," she replied with much simplicity.

"But why?"

"Because, I would not."

"That is no answer."

"Because I love you as you are, then."

"But I cannot forget that youth attracts youth by natural law—that most young girls are best pleased with young men as lovers."

Her arm was about his neck, her lips at his

ear, though the deepening blush on her perfect face was not wholly hidden away.

"You darling! you brave, you dauntless darling!" she murmured. "I love you, not for your youth nor for your years, but for yourself alone!"

"Truly?"

"Ah, but you do not you can never doubt it! Would I have you unseared by a single experience or adventure that may have written over the dark pages of your varied life? No, not for the world! My heart could never have been given save to a man, and as such, have I found you, my hero, my ideal!"

"Still, if I were just a little younger?"

"Then you would not be yourself—my 'Douglass, Douglass, tender and true.'"

"Still—"

But the perfect lips were now kissing away his words, and more in that vein she would not hear.

"Your story!" she murmured, presently.

"Let me have the story of your life."

"Well, there is yet more against me than my hoary antiquity."

"Is it possible?"

"My parents were poor and obscure persons, of Scotch extraction, and are long since dead."

"I have always admired Scotland. The Highlanders are a noble race, barring the bagpipe, the horrid kilts and bare knees; while I just dote on Bobby Burns and Walter Scott."

"I never had either brother or sister."

"Nor I; which makes us even."

"But I hardly ever even went to school; am almost wholly self-educated."

"Self-made men are my admiration, when not too worshipful of their maker, as I am sure you are not."

"Thank you. But, hang it all, my love, I'm not self-made. After my long battle with the world, I am poor to-day as a church mouse."

"Poor in filthy lucre, you mean."

"By Jove, Inez! you won't permit me to make out my own photograph."

"Self-depreciation is not good. Will you go on with your story, sir?"

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE DETECTIVE'S HISTORY.

"I EARLY went to sea," went on the detective, "and thereafter the water was chiefly my home."

"At the age of eighteen, I found myself, after years of restless adventure, a member of General Martez's revolutionary force in Honduras."

"The general had not long been married, and I became a favorite with both his young wife and himself."

"The Senora Zarapatta was at that time a singularly beautiful and attractive woman, with little if any manifestation of the evil inherent in her nature. The twins were beautiful children of five or six years."

"I was a sort of privileged retainer in the family, then second to none in Central America in wealth, influence and social standing, though constantly in more or less hot water through the general's turbulent revolutionary tendencies."

"These also occasioned home differences. The general was a Liberal of the Liberals in politics and religion—a Democrat and born leader in one; his wife sympathized with the most bigoted of Conservatives, who were mostly in power in Church and State—an *aristo* of the old Inquisitorial stock."

"However, she had been poor and ambitious, and he had brought her wealth and reflected honors. For appearances' sake, they were seemingly one in everything, though there were many secret bickerings, and her violent, cruel and heartless temper, as it developed itself, was a source of much suffering to his honorable and generous spirit."

"Though nearly a man grown, I was at that time of very boyish appearance, fair-skinned, fair-haired, ruddy-cheeked, bright-eyed, just the sort of a *Colorado* to hit the fancy of the senoritas of that summer clime, who are mostly of a dark beauty and languishing manners, which latter, however, are so often the mask of volcanic passions, that may be dangerous when thwarted or roused."

"I thus allude to my personal appearance as the only possible explanation of the favoritism in which the Senorina Martez held me—at first. It was not love, but a mere caprice, on her part. I was her *protege*. She called me her *Americano Colorado*, and made much of me. For my own part, I early penetrated the beautiful creature's fierce, false and treacherous disposition, and came to hold her in secret distrust and dread."

"Moreover, she had even that early in life come to like such pets as snakes, jaguar cubs, and similar unpleasant companions, which were no less her husband's abhorrence than my own."

"I was brave and adventurous in the intestine military and political troubles, of which Honduras was more or less constantly the theater, and soon became a favored member of General Martez's staff."

"The revolution of which I spoke was by no means the first or only one in which I was engaged."

"The second, which occurred a year later, placed Martez in power. But the differences between him and his wife had increased, and he was the more inclined to favor a proposed visit to her New York relative at that time. He even made her a sort of Government financial-agent, and, when she took her departure, it was in company with a couple of native merchants, trusted and experienced men, supplied with large sums of money, for the furtherance of political recognition and commercial alliances.

"The senora, on the occasion of that visit, left her twins at home. That was also the occasion of her accomplishing the ruin of your poor father, George Delorme, which, as you already know, was indeed the private object of the voyage.

"Don't look so distressed, for I shall hardly be forced to allude to this melancholy subject again.

"The senora's visit did not last a twelve-month, but what a long period is that for a country, the chronic prey to political earthquakes!

"She left us in full feather, at the apex of the governmental fabric; when she returned, we were hunted fugitives in the mountains, our army a ragged remnant, our *comisariato* the wild game of the primeval woods, the remaining bulwarks of defense our shivered bayonets and broken swords. We had been up and soaring; we were down again with a vengeance—the rocket-and-stick business over again.

"Then did the treacherous, ingrate nature of the Senora Martez declare itself at last. Her mask of hypocrisy was flung aside. She denounced her husband and his cause, openly espoused the Conservative Church party, then again in power, and even donated a large sum of money to its success in hunting down the unfortunate Martez and his followers.

"By strange coincidence, the sum of money thus infamously contributed was identical with that obtained from the Bank of Gotham on forged acceptances, and for alleged participation in which George Delorme had been sent to State Prison—ah! I have brought it up again, though it was hardly to be helped!"

Inez interrupted him with a passionate gesture.

"God of justice!" she exclaimed, inconceivably shocked, "had the vile woman actually instigated the forgeries herself?"

The narrator shook his head dubiously.

"That is not known, probably never will be known to a certainty. But the fact is as I have stated. There was no other source from which the senorina could have obtained such a great sum, though she pretended there had been, and hinted of secret operations in the New York gold market, which had been unexpectedly successful.

"But her own husband at that time believed her capable of such baseness. There were others—men not in political affiliation with him either—who secretly coincided with his opinion. Moreover, of the two merchant agents who had accompanied her mission, one had mysteriously disappeared, and the other, a Colonel Blanco, returned in such suspicious familiarity with the fair traitress that his name was coupled by rumor with hers in a manner by no means complimentary to the morals of either. But of all this there was no proof; it was rumor and suspicion—nothing more."

Inez threw up her hands with a hopeless, despairing air.

"My father, my poor father!" she half-sobbed, "what chance had he—what chance might any honorable, unsuspecting man have had—when environed by such toils? Oh, it is too, too horrible!"

The detective hastened to continue his narrative:

"Our cause—that is, General Martez's cause—was almost at its last gasp, but such of us as were left alive continued to stick together. But the armed search for us was incessant and severe.

"A year after the beginning of our misfortunes, I was taken prisoner in one of our flying skirmishes in the heart of the Cordilleras, about sixty miles south of Comayagua, on the Nicaraguan frontier.

"The Senora Zarapatta had in the mean time risen greatly in the estimation of the governing power, and had established herself in a wild, mountain-girt and fortified hacienda, one of her husband's confiscated estates, which had been presented to her as a reward of her treachery.

"Its deep, hot valleys comprised indigo and coffee plantations, that were immensely lucrative, and there she held a sort of isolated and barbaric court, surrounded by her peons and retainers, among whom, by reason of her friendliness with serpents, no less than by numerous other eccentricities, she was already known and held in mysterious awe as the White Sibyl of Morona—this last being the ancient name of the hacienda, or miniature principality, over which she held absolute sway.

"It was by one of the licensed predatory bands attached to her estate that I chanced to be captured, and I was brought before her for judgment.

"Two years had passed since we had last met,

and no sooner was I in her presence than I understood one of the qualifications of her new appellation.

"Her complexion, which had formerly been of pure and transparent though healthful pallor, had already assumed that dead, bloodless and absolute whiteness which has ever since remained one of her characteristics. And added to this, her eyes and general expression had somehow taken on that serpent suggestiveness which even now contributes so greatly to render her beauty so terrible—so magnetic and yet so repugnant."

Inez shuddered involuntarily at the recollection of her recent forced companionship with the senora.

"She smiled strangely when I was brought, a captive, into her presence, and by a gesture dismissed the guerrillas guarding me.

"I was then alone before her. She was magnificently throned amid gorgeous trappings and upholsterings on a sort of dais of red velvet, fringed with golds, while the numerous pet serpents twining about her person seemed fitly emblematic of her untrammelled and evil power.

"She spoke me very sweetly at first, referring to her former liking for me, and her regret that we were no longer friends.

"I began to secretly congratulate myself on a prospect of getting out of her clutches easily; for former prisoners from our band had, almost without exception, been tauntingly dismissed from her presence to be shot on sight.

"But her next words dashed me from the pinnacle of hope to the depths of despair.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE DETECTIVE'S HISTORY, CONTINUED.

"SHE coolly proposed that I should betray the last fastness of my leader (her own husband—the father of her children) and his followers into her hands, that they might be extirpated forthwith.

"This was her infernal proposition. Compliance therewith was to be richly rewarded; the reward of its refusal was instant death.

"On my instant and contemptuous rejection of her proposition, she flew into a fury that positively appalled me.

"She loaded me with reproaches and the peculiarly diabolical epithets that are the special property of the Spanish tongue, swore that she had always secretly hated and despised me, and then called in her swarthy minions to lead me out to my death.

"Upon their appearance, however, she changed her mind.

"I should have mentioned that, in my passionate and unguarded rejection of her proposition, I had permitted myself to allude mockingly to the serpent-suggestiveness of her countenance.

"She remembered this now, and, controlling herself, said: 'Wait! *Americano Colorado*, I shall reserve you for another fate. You have alluded to the serpent-element of my beauty. I shall so brand you that you shall never lose the sense of my power, and after that you shall pine in perpetual imprisonment.'

"She then ordered that her twin boys should be brought in, and also engaged in consultation with one of her peons, an aged Maya Indian, who proved to be a professional embalmer and tattooer among his tribe.

"Then I was unopposed, thrown down, my arm bared, and there, in the presence of her twin-devils and herself, I was subjected to the operation that left me impressed with the emblematic device that you have seen.

"It was indescribably painful, even agonizing, and the more so that there was then and there performed swiftly and at once a tattooing elaboration that is seldom, if ever, effected in the course of many successive days.

"But I bore up, and not a complaint or protest escaped me during the torturing ordeal, notwithstanding the taunts of the senora, the aping amusement of her retainers and the mocking laughter of the juveniles, who seemed to deem my suppressed anguish the rarest of sports.

"When the design was fastened indelibly upon my arm, the senora surveyed it critically, but not with unmingled satisfaction.

"It is not altogether as I would have had it," she said. "There should more unmistakable signs of the athlete succumbing to the serpent in the contest, and the red arrow from the cloud—as symboling Heaven's assisting vengeance at my supplication, no less than duplicating the divine birthmark on my elder twin's fair cheek—might have been represented as already finding its rankling home in the wrestler's breast. However, it must answer. Away with him to the prison-cell that shall likewise be his tomb."

"For five days I nursed my painful arm and the hope of vengeance in the solitary prison-cave to which the senora's serpent-malice had consigned me.

"On the sixth day I effected my escape, and rejoined my fugitive brethren. But, alas! they were by this time reduced to a pitiful handful. Shortly after this we separately effected our escape over the San Salvadorean frontier.

"Years later my wandering and adventurous life again led me to Honduras.

"The indomitable Martez was once more at the top of the revolutionary caldron, or nearly so.

"He was heading a powerful liberal faction in an endeavor to get possession of the government, and, what was yet more strange, his wife, the senora, had temporarily thrown her conservative friends over, and was a partner of his enterprise.

"I could never quite understand how the general had consented to a reconciliation, but have a general idea that it was brought about solely for political motives. At all events, though they were living in the same palace, their establishments were otherwise distinct, and I soon found that their intercourse was confined solely to public occasions.

"I was once more persuaded to cast my errant fortunes with the revolutionists, and again became an officer on General Martez's staff.

"Three days later we were beaten in a decisive battle with the Government troops on a plain midway between Truxillo and Comayagua, and were once more fugitives and proscribed.

"However, a considerable force still remained to us, though our future looked dismal with difficulties daily thickening around us.

"It was at this time that General Martez decided to send away for safe-keeping the jewels that had been but recently contributed by numerous wealthy and influential Liberal families for the benefit of the cause, until such time as they might be converted into cash, or returned to their original owners according as the next turn in the tide of war might determine.

"He had become an intimate and appreciative friend of your grandfather, Captain Marston, during his exile, and pitched upon him as the custodian of the treasure. I think his selection of his wife as the treasure-bearer (under certain outside and accompanying supervision that was trustworthy) was determined upon, chiefly with the desire to secure her absence, together with that of her twins, from Honduras, for he had evidently never lost a fear of fresh treachery on her part, and the sons were so much under their mother's influence that he had hardly any more confidence in their professed good faith than in hers.

"So it was arranged. You know the rest, or most of it, Inez.

"The senora's vain attempt to obtain the jewels from your grandfather after they had been delivered into his custody; her return to Honduras, leaving the twins to become your household companions; her subsequent treachery, by which her unfortunate husband was, for a fixed price, betrayed into the hands of his executioners. These are facts already within your knowledge.

"There is not a great deal for me to add. Before the senora's return from her second mission we had been defeated in a second battle and hopelessly scattered. Soon after the gallant general's death I managed to escape from the country, never to return. The senora had retired with the proceeds of her treachery to Morona.

"There she continued to live in rather reduced splendor, apparently nursing the dream of sooner or later obtaining possession of the jewel treasure—whose value was doubtless exaggerated in her imagination—by fair means or foul. Her sons, upon their return to Honduras, were entered into the naval service there, in which I have learned they chiefly distinguished themselves by careers of lawlessness, insubordination and crime. But it's a mighty one-horse sort of a navy, for that matter.

"Their reappearance here of late, and the crimes that signalized their presence in New York are too fresh to be dwelt upon between us.

"Several years ago I entered the detective service here, and had already somewhat distinguished myself in my specialty when I made your grandfather's acquaintance. My former intimacy with General Martez was a further introduction into his good graces. He made me his friend and confidant. Then came the whirl of darkness and crime that made me your friend and counselor. Thank God, I am also your lover. I feel that our long and stormy quest is nearly at an end. Then you will be my bride, my wife, my eternal. My story is ended."

He opened wide his arms, and Inez showed her appreciation of the strange, eventful history by melting upon his breast.

"Tell me one other thing," she said, at last.

"What is it?"

"Should the senora succeed in carrying the treasure away?"

"But she shall not succeed! We shall be beforehand with White Witch, if there is justice in Providence and the old wind-charm in the Seamen's white wings?"

"I said if—"

"Ah, pardon me!"

"If she should succeed?"

"Well?"

"Would she be able to apply their money value to her own use?"

"With scarcely a doubt. The families that originally contributed the jeweled heirlooms are no longer in existence. I think that, with

scarcely an exception, they were literally exterminated, root and branch, by the bloody, relentless reprisals following upon that last crushing defeat of the liberal cause in Honduras."

"Then if we should obtain possession of the jewels?"

"Then they would be ours, or rather yours, as being a part of your grandfather's estate, subject solely to the proofs of other ownership, in total or in part, being non-existent, according as systematic and honorable inquiry might determine."

"That was what I wanted to know."

It was now late in the afternoon, and at this juncture it was announced that little Starlight had returned from the dockyard with a message for Ensco from Mr. Dago.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

PREPARING FOR A LAST EXPEDITION.

THE messenger was at once admitted, and his tidings proved to be of the utmost importance.

Mr. Dago was already on his way to the Astoria anchorage, with the Seamew in perfect trim.

Mr. Dago would also anxiously await fresh orders there, and the good northwest wind was freshening, with indications that it would hold.

Ensco at once arose with an eager look.

"Hooray!" cried Starlight, wholly unsubdued by the unusual splendor of his drawing-room surroundings. "It'll be up anchor and away again. Won't it, boss?"

The detective gravely nodded.

"What is your plan?" asked Inez.

"Undetermined as yet. Shall have to consult with Dago."

"Well, I shall get on my things in no time." And she started to quit the room.

"Hold on! Surely you are not going?"

"Am I not? Then I don't know myself."

"Run on down to the landing, Starlight." And then, after the boy had disappeared. "I really have not thought of you accompanying us, dearest."

"But I have meant it from the first."

"There'll be a heavy swell on, like enough, down the lower bay."

Worse than on the stormy night when I first began to—*to know you?*"

He flushed with pleasure.

"That terrible, yet partly joyful, first night!" he muttered. "No, no; of course not. Still, down Rockaway Reef way, with this freshening wind?"

"An off-shore one, before which the Seamew will glance and skim in the moonlight, like one of her white-feathered namesakes in the wild wave's running wake!" And then her soft touch was on his arm. "Besides, when has lower bay ground-swell troubled a tried salt like me?"

He took her in his arms, gazing lovingly down into the sweet, brave face.

"You will have it so?"

"I shall not sever from you again—even adventure must not separate us more!"

"Fresh danger, perhaps; I doubt not that the Ghost may likewise choose to-night's low tide for a like attempt."

"Have I ever shrunk from danger when shared with you?"

"This is so soon upon the shocks you have sustained—the recent revelation—your new-found parents!"

"Ay; and my poor father dying on the threshold of it all! But that is why I must go with you." She dashed aside the springing tears. "I would not forget—no, no! but I must have change, excitement, and sympathy shared by you. Oh, Douglass! don't you understand?"

"Yes," and he kissed her brow. "Go and make yourself ready, in God's name!"

The boat, with Mingo and Starlight at the oars, was in readiness when they reached the little landing, and, better than that, the graceful Seamew could already be sighted at her Astoria offing.

Half an hour later Ensco, Inez, and Mr. Dago were consulting in the yacht's saloon.

"When is low-tide at the reef?" demanded the detective.

"An hour after midnight," replied the yacht captain.

"And the moon?"

"Then at its meridian."

"Had we not better start at once?"

"There is ample time, but we are already getting under way. In fact, there was no particular need of coming up here from the dry-dock, but I was anxious to see how the Seamew would work after her scraping and repairs."

"How does she work?"

"Beautifully—to a charm!"

"Has it occurred to you that one or two of us might prudently reconnoiter by running down to Rockaway Beach by rail?"

"Yes; but it won't be necessary. With this wind we'll make the reefs easily by midnight, with perhaps an hour to spare. Then the regular excursion business is not yet fully under way at the beach, and we'll be likely to have our treasure-seeking all to ourselves."

"Unless the Ghost should choose the next low tide for her opportunity, too."

Mr. Dago shifted his position a little uneasily at the table where they were sitting; only looking up to nod his acquiescence to Gaff, who at that moment looked in to announce that the yacht was under way.

"Of course, that has occurred to me," said he, after a pause. "But I've thought it all over, and we would have the advantage of that infernal steam-launch in more ways than one, should we chance to be at cross-purposes with her again. Of that I feel assured."

"Please explain," said the detective, while Inez was no less interested. "How would we have the advantage?—apart from fighting her off at a pinch, I mean, as a matter of course."

"First, I am satisfied that the Ghost is seriously crippled—too much so to put to sea with the treasure, even if the latter were secured by her."

"I doubt that. The senora would take the risk, anyway; so that such a thing as our being forestalled must not be thought of."

"Well and good. Next, she draws too much water to get within twenty rods of the reefs, with safety to herself."

"Ah!"

"So that she would have to operate with a small boat, which would necessarily divide her fighting force in case it should come to blows."

"A good point!"

"While the Seamew, with the center-board up, can dance like a duck within a biscuit's toss of the inner reef, which the Spanish letter indicates as the one containing the buried treasure."

"I see! we shall have the advantage, as you say."

"Still," said Inez, "let us hope that we shall not be interrupted. The Ghost has lost some of its mysterious terrors for me. She looked so forlorn, and labored so uneasily, when she took Juan on board this morning, after Vasco's capture, that she no longer seemed formidable."

"There's intelligence and life in her yet, Miss Delorme," said Dago, "and let us not forget that the terrible senora herself is now the master-spirit."

"We're not likely to forget that," said the detective; "and for that reason I sincerely hope we may come at cross-purposes to-night."

"You do hope it!" cried Inez, in surprise.

"Certainly. Do you not see that such a meeting may constitute our only remaining opportunity for the capture of Juan and his mother?"

"I do see it now. They are doubtless equally responsible for the murders that took place on that terrible night."

"Let us only capture them, and that will be left to the courts."

He went on deck to find that they were slipping easily down the river.

The wind continued to freshen, and after passing Governor's Island, shortly after sunset, the gallant Seamew was laid upon a free course, with every stitch drawing and the water running back under the rail like a mill-race.

"If the wind doesn't shift," said Mr. Dago, "we ought to reach our destination by eleven o'clock. Let us go down to supper."

Inez, upon returning to the saloon, found that an unexpectedly elegant repast had been provided.

"You are having better living on the Seamew than I thought," said she, with pleased surprise.

Mr. Dago modestly explained that he had ordered the supper of a fashionable down-town restaurant, before quitting the dock-yard, in anticipation of her presence on board.

"What! you really did look for me in the expedition?" exclaimed Inez, while the discussion of the repast was forthwith begun. "That is more than Mr. Ensco did."

"Don't be so sure of that," observed the detective, with a smile.

"What, sir! did you not try your best to dissuade me from going?"

"Most assuredly, as I was in duty bound to do."

"Well?"

"But that doesn't follow that I had any idea of your permitting yourself to be dissuaded." And he laughed in a way that she could not take offense at.

"Oh, indeed! Well, perhaps I shall know just how seriously to take you hereafter."

"But really, Inez, I was nothing if not serious in my attempt to dissuade you," said the detective, gravely. "But at the same time I felt almost certain that you would over-ride my objections, no matter how strongly presented."

"Then you must take it for granted that I am a very willful and headstrong individual."

"I am partial to a strong will—in a woman."

"Even if there be danger of it clashing with your own?"

"That depends."

"Depends on what?"

"On who the woman is, and how much she may care for me and I for her."

She only replied with a pleased look, and then they both burst out laughing together.

"For my part," said John Dago, quietly, "I felt pretty sure that Miss Delorme's adventurous disposition would not fail to demand a share in

what is likely to prove the crowning enterprise of our exciting quest. And I could not help, moreover, in thinking of the old lines in her connection:

"When a woman will, she will,
You may depend on't;
And when she won't, she won't,
And there's an end on't."

Then they all laughed, and so it was in very confident spirits that they were proceeding upon this crowning adventure.

But it was destined that all should not be smooth sailing and fair-weather fortune.

Just outside the Narrows the wind shifted dead around from northwest to southeast, and thenceforth the Seamew was to have it in her teeth.

It was now past eight o'clock, and, to make matters worse, the night, prior to moon-rise, was shutting down extremely dark, with here and there but an occasional star in the fleeting interstices between masses of threatening cloud.

The lower bay seemed absolutely deserted of all sorts of craft, and even the Gravesend and Staten Island shore-lights seemed unnaturally far away, with something unreal and uncertain in their twinklings.

"The devil's in the wind!" growled Tom Gaff, who was at the wheel. "Looks like a reg'lar to-windward voyage of it, even fur such a miserable little one-horse run!"

"It is worse luck than we had a right to expect," admitted Mr. Dago. "But growling won't better it."

Inez, who had also come on deck with Ensco, looked a little anxious.

"Still," she asked, "we shall reach the reefs in time, shall we not?"

"Oh, yes, without a doubt, I hope," replied the yacht-captain, cheerfully. "That is, unless a regular southeast gale should set in, which isn't at all likely at this season of the year, or—"

He hesitated.

"Or what?" demanded the young mistress of the Seamew.

"Or unless something more unforeseen should interfere," he added, with less hopefulness.

"How provoking you are! You might as well have answered at once, 'Oh, yes, we're bound to get there, Eli—that is, if we don't!'"

Dago laughed.

"Well, but candidly, Miss Delorme, can anything better be predicted of almost every enterprise in which we take the chances?"

"Perhaps not. But you might specify the 'something yet more unforeseen' that may interfere."

"There it is now—look!"

It was her lover-detective who spoke, and he was pointing away through the gloom with his hand.

A graceful black craft, with a single red lantern, like a bloodshot eye at her prow, was silently forging past them, headed for the open sea.

"It is the Ghost!" faltered the young girl, instinctively drawing closer to his side.

There was no denying it.

Their witch-like water-enemy was once more unmistakably on hand.

CHAPTER XL.

ROCKAWAY REEF.

MR. DAGO was, however, rubbing his hands together after a rather reassuring manner of his.

"It is all right!" he said, softly. "It is all right enough!"

"It is also well to have a sanguine disposition," observed Inez, a little sarcastically. "Steam isn't a bit superior to sails in a head-wind, as a matter of course. Oh, no!"

"You are unnecessarily ironical, Miss Delorme," said the captain, with his smile.

"Are you sure of that?"

"Quite sure. A mere glance should convince you that the sea-witch, that has caused us so much trouble, is no longer to be greatly feared."

"That is true," interposed the detective, studying the receding outline of the Ghost's stern. "Every movement is labored. There is scarcely a trace of the silent ease and fleetness that used to mystify and incense us."

"Oh, she's a hopeless cripple, and the devil himself, though she be his pet craft, couldn't help her in a gale. I tell you, it's all right!"

Here the Seamew went over on her starboard tack, the hillocky water seething under her counter like a cataract.

"But, barring the gale," said Inez, "won't she reach the reefs before us?"

"Undoubtedly, if she doesn't blow up," responded Dago. "But the tide hurries and waits for no man—nor woman, either."

"It will be well," muttered the detective, with a resumption of his satisfied look. "We shall have another chance at the Ghost, treasure or no treasure."

"Desperate as the senora must be," said Inez, after a reflective pause, "I do not think she would try to go out to sea, under any circumstances."

"Why not?"

"Do you forget that she has but one twin with her? Even Juan would not, I am certain, listen to a proposition to leave Vasco behind."

"I am not so sure of that."

"But, whatever their faults and crimes, the brothers are devoted to each other."

"Granted. But Vasco has still a chance of escaping conviction. There is no tell-tale sapphire-ring, nor yet a pair of mottoed bowie-knives, to plead directly against him."

"True."

"While I am satisfied that the murders of the Seamew can be swiftly brought home to both Juan and his mother."

"You still have the poison-ring?"

"Of course."

"And the two knives?"

"Yes. Oh, never fear! It is not as if Vasco were deserting his brother and mother. That would be like leaving them in the jaws of death, indeed!"

It seemed that Ensco was to prove right, and Inez wrong, so far as the intention of the Ghost was concerned.

When the Seamew came within view of the reefs at about midnight, with a stormy moon to light up the scene, the steam-yacht was waiting off the outer line, but with everything snug, and a general aspect of being ready for sea.

The Seamew was enabled, by her light draught, to obtain an inside position, and presently took in sail and came to anchor close to where the boiling and frothing water indicated the presence of the second reef, still submerged, in whose pocket the jewel-treasure was said to be buried.

The last of the ebb was hurrying out, and the two vessels, about a hundred rods apart, had the appearance of silently and jealously watching each other like animate and wary water-beasts of prey, each intent upon some anticipated quarry, and equally determined to forestall the other in the critical spring.

There was not a sign of life on the adjacent beach, ordinarily by day and evening the resort of pleasure-seeking throngs a little later in the season.

Neither was there the glimmer of a ship-light far and near, other than was displayed by the rival vessels.

Above was the storm scud of the flying rack, with the haggard moon running at hide-and-seek from rift to rift like a hunted thing; below and around nothing but the loneliness, the solitude and the savagery of sea and sand.

But Ensco and Dago had quietly formulated their plan of operation with the utmost confidence.

Scarcely did the unquiet water over the inner reef give indications of materially shallowing before the detective, accompanied by Gaff and Jones, were overboard, knee-deep in brine, and spade in hand.

True, just then, the Ghost's small boat, containing three men—in itself a confession of the weakness of the senora's force—was seen to put off, and begin to round the outer edge of the outlying reef, with the intention of disputing the digging claim, so to speak.

But a moment later, the Seamew's pinnace, with Mr. Dago himself at the helm, her small sail fluttering in the strong wind, little Starlight in the waist, and the giant form of Mingo at the prow, slanted out from under the yacht's quarter, heading away to round the inner point of the same obstruction, and thus cut off communication between the steam-yacht and her boat.

Inez, who was left alone on the Seamew, took up a position, revolver in hand, by which she could command the entire scene, and anxiously awaited developments.

Presently she uttered a satisfied exclamation.

The Ghost's boat, after a hesitating pause upon perceiving the countering tactics that were being made manifest, at length continued her course for the shallowing ledge, on which the tide-water was by this time less than ankle deep; while the pinnace, upon her part skimmed away toward the steamer, which, if all went well, would ere long experience such a disabling torpedo-shock under her sternpost as would put an end to her sea-going dreams indefinitely.

It was an intensely dramatic and exciting situation, especially for the on-looking Inez.

Her eyes were still following the pinnace, when Ensco's shout of warning almost under the yacht's rail caused her to hurry thither and look over, though crouching behind the bulwark.

The water had entirely receded from the reef, and both Gaff and Jones were digging in the sand as if for dear life, while the detective, his feet still washed by the retreating waves, was standing guard over them and holding off the Ghost's boat, now but a cable's length away, revolver in hand.

It was Juan Martez himself who was at the bow.

Inez could plainly distinguish the desperate paleness of his wild face in the moonlight, his black eyes ablaze with reckless determination, the ruddy arrow standing out on his cheek as if stamped in blood.

"Once more, Juan Martez," called out the detective, "I warn you to stand off, if you have

any regard for the lives of the perhaps innocent men with you!"

A hoarse, snarling laugh was his sole response, and Juan seemed to give an order to his followers without turning his head.

Here was a surprise.

The two oarsmen suddenly resumed their interrupted stroke, and instantly two other ruffians, heretofore lying concealed under the thwarts, sprung into view at Juan's back, armed to the teeth.

Though taken aback somewhat, the detective fired on the instant, bringing one of the men heavily down over the gunwale; but as the boat bounded forward, a second attempt, with equally fatal intention, was a miss-fire.

Juan burst into his hoarse laugh again, and with his revolver, drew a point-blank bead upon the Harbor Detective's heart at less than six remaining yards.

Inez uttered a scream, and, leveling her small revolver, fired almost at random.

Juan's pistol-hand fell helpless to his side with a broken wrist.

But at that instant the boat grounded high up on the reef.

Followed pell-mell by his three remaining followers, Juan, with his revolver in his left hand, was out in a trice, and, while the detective was suddenly beset by odds, the young Honduran made a desperate attack upon Gaff and Jones, who had just succeeded in unearthing a steel-bound casket, about a foot square, whose burnished hoops or guards glistened brightly in the moonlight.

It was the jewel-chest, and for a moment there was a wild and desperate struggle for its possession.

But Inez succeeded in getting in another shot, that dashed aside Juan's revolver just as it was pressed against Gaff's ear, causing the shot to explode harmlessly; and this enabled both Gaff and Jones to fight with their spades, while the second of the two armed men, who had so suddenly sprung into view, staggered back, with an ounce-ball from the detective's six-shooter in his side.

Almost at the same time, however, a second left-handed essay on the part of Juan was successful, and Jones was down on his hands and knees, directly over the treasure-box, with the blood spurting over it from a deep wound in the shoulder.

Then Gaff began to play his spade upon the detective's two remaining assailants, while both Ensco and Juan simultaneously grasped the chest at either end.

"Hold onto it, Douglass!" screamed Inez, half-beside herself with excitement, and she was already half over the yacht's side. "I am coming to your aid!"

She then lost her footing and pitched forward, falling partly in the water and partly on the sand, but none the less firing her revolver once more as she went down.

Juan started back, dropping his end of the chest, and uttering a snarl of pain while pressing his hand to his side, where the bullet had glanced from a rib after inflicting a dangerous flesh wound.

The next instant the detective had sprung upon him like a tiger, while Inez, who had quickly scrambled to her feet, grasped the chest, dragged it from under Jones's prostrate form, and then, by a final exertion of all her strength, lifted it up in her arms, and hoisted it up over the rail upon the Seamew's deck.

Just then, however, Ensco unfortunately napped a random blow from an oar in the hands of one of his original assailants, and staggered back, relinquishing his grasp upon Juan.

Here there came the sound of firing, mingled with furious cries in a woman's voice, from the direction of the steam-launch.

"All's lost!" cried Juan, after giving one wild look. "Quick, there, you two."

And he forthwith scrambled back into the boat, after pushing her off.

CHAPTER XLI.

"LAST SCENE OF ALL."

GAFF had also been momentarily beaten back, so that his two opponents were enabled, though both were bruised and bleeding, to obey their young master's order.

In another moment the boat was hurriedly rounding out, to return to the Ghost, with Juan and his two remaining ruffians on board, and the form of the dead one still hanging limply over the gunwale.

The reef had been held, and the treasure-chest was won!

Ensco sent a last bullet after the boat, which caused the stroke-oarsman to throw up his hands with a yell, and then turned to clasp Inez in his arms, regardless of the fact that Gaff was looking on.

"Noble woman! but for you we should have been overpowered," was all he could say.

Then, Inez assisting, Jones was helped up over the yacht's side, and all were once more on the Seamew's deck, with the dearly-bought treasure at their feet.

"I'm not so bad off!" said Jones, rallying.

"I feel better already. How is the pinnace doing?"

But Inez insisted on ministering to his hurt then and there, though occasionally looking up to follow the eyes of Ensco and Gaff, which were directed to the exciting scene going on in the vicinity of the Ghost.

This may be briefly described.

The pinnace had come to a pause almost directly under her counter, and Mingo was crouching behind a heavy plank which he had raised as a shield against a succession of shots that were being poured out and down from over the steamer's taffrail by the senora and her remaining crew, four in number, she herself being conspicuous by her fierce cries, while Dago and Starlight, somewhat similarly protected by a raised plank, were managing the boat to the best of their ability, and occasionally responding with a shot or two.

At length Juan and his two men were seen to reach and be helped up over the Ghost's side.

At that same moment, however, the Seamew's pinnace, caught a fortunate puff in her sail, and was seen to dart under the overhang of the Ghost's stern.

Then there was a second pause, during which Mingo was dimly seen to reach out toward the stern-post with something dark and heavy in his hands.

He was empty-hand a moment later, when the pinnace sheered off and was away again, like a storm-bird on the wing.

The senora, with the tempestuous hood of her midnight hair streaming in the wind, was seen to wave her followers to the opposite side of the poop for a resumption of the firing upon the flying pinnace.

Then there was a flash under the steam-yacht's counter, followed by an explosion.

The entire stern seemed to be hurled high in the air, and the sea was torn piecemeal in its vicinity.

"Heavens!" exclaimed Ensco; "that is more than we intended. See! instead of merely the rudder and the screw, half the entire stern is ripped out of her."

And Gaff and he at once began hoisting the anchor and getting the Seamew under way.

"Oh, it is worse than that!" cried Inez who had by this time succeeded in making Jones a good-deal more comfortable. "Look! the Ghost is on fire!"

This was true.

By the time the Seamew had rounded out from between the reefs, and taken her pinnace and crew on board, flames were darting out from many parts of the steam-yacht.

"That's the last of her!" shouted the detective. "Lay up as close as possible, Dago. There's yet a chance of our saving some one, and Juan and his mother may yet take to the small boat."

This was accordingly done, though the captain shook his head, and the pinnace was again made ready.

But the Ghost must have had a magazine containing considerable material, for a moment later there was a terrific explosion from somewhere amidships, and she seemed to be literally torn in halves lengthwise.

The darkness was sown with flying fragments of burning material, interspersed with heavier objects, probably the mutilated forms of human beings.

One of these fell with a dull splash close under the bow of the Seamew.

It was the dead body of Juan Martez, the elder of the demon-twins.

It floated for a moment, with its blackened, distorted face, still bearing a sort of defiant menace in death, and was then borne rapidly away by the tail-end of the ebb-tide.

Inez had seen it, and she fell on her knees behind the rail, burying her face in her hands.

A shout of mingled satisfaction and horror from her companions caused her to raise her head and look again in obedience to a species of fascination.

The last recognizable fragment of the doomed steam-yacht, which comprised the greater part of her after cabin, wreathed in flames, was drifting out to sea.

In its fiery center was the terrible Senorina Zarapatta, twined round by her pet serpents, awfully beautiful, appallingly defiant to the last, her hair in the wind, her bare arms stretched out toward her pursuers in the attitude of an undying curse.

There came a fierce gust of the wind, a sort of whirling eddy, and she disappeared in a curtain of fire, to be known of men no more, save as a smoldering, rapidly fading spot, tossing afar on the bosom of the out-running tide.

"Terrible in life, terrible in death!" exclaimed Rowlock Ensco, in a solemn and impressive voice. "The world has seldom, if ever, held a more dangerous and wicked woman than she who has gone to her frightful doom. May her future reward be such as is her due, no more, no less!"

Inez had fainted.

When she recovered she was alone in the saloon of the Seamew with her lover.

The latter, while watching her restoration, had bared his right arm.

Now, catching her glance, he gazed earnestly

upon the emblem thereon tattooed, with a satisfied smile that was sufficiently significant to her.

CHAPTER XLII.

CONCLUSION.

THE murder-mystery of the yacht Seamew was finally unraveled, though the perpetrators of the crime were never brought to justice in the legal sense of the term.

Two days after the tragical circumstances of the Ghost's destruction were made public, with such sensational accompaniment as can be readily imagined, Vasco Martez was found dead in his prison-cell, the victim of a self-inflicted wound.

The suicide occasioned general surprise, as the young man had been in his usual reckless high spirits up to the last that had been seen of him alive, and he had already secured eminent legal defenders in the criminal line.

But there was no longer any surprise when it was found that he had left a written confession, which was speedily made public.

In this confession he plainly stated that his brother Juan, with five ruffianly followers, had accomplished the murder of Captain Grant Marston, his second officer and steward, together with the robbery of the jewel-treasure, and that the senorina had directly instigated the crime.

There was yet other matter embodied in the confession, the nature of which is not relevant.

It seemed that Vasco had really lost heart completely, on being informed of the terrible doom that had overtaken his mother and brother, and had then predetermined his suicide, even while keeping up an outward show of bravado and high spirits.

Inez and Ensco were married on the Fourth of July following.

They are now traveling in Europe, accompanied by Mrs. Delorme, who, in the sunshine of rehabilitated fortunes and a tender daughter's love, is once more knowing something of happiness and joy.

The gallant Seamew and her crew—including Sailor Jones, who speedily recovered from his wound; Mingo, whose giant strength is still the wonder of harbor and river men, and little Starlight, whose future is secure if Inez and Ensco can make it so—are yet here and there in New York waters, awaiting for whatever orders may be forthcoming from Skipper Inez, as honest John Dago insists in speaking of the proprietress.

The origin of the strange steam-launch, that has figured so prominently throughout our story, has never been determined, and she carried the secret to her grave.

Negotiations are still going on for the discovery of the original owners of the contents of the jewel-chest, but without much success; and the probability is that the gems—said to be worth a quarter of a million—will ultimately be declared the property of Inez.

But there is one heirloom that will doubtless be treasured as a strange and valuable curiosity by both Ensco and his wife.

It is a diamond-girt sapphire, in unique setting, and the poison-secret of the tiny blade that is its occult property must ever remain a souvenir of the perils and escapes that were hazarded in order to bring its companion-jewels of the stolen casket to light, when the fair young girl herself became the fairest gem in the reward vouchsafed to Rowlock Ensco, the whilom Harbor Detective.

THE END.

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- 89 The Pirate Prince; or, The Queen of the Isle.
- 94 Freelance, the Buccaneer.
- 103 Merle, the Mutineer; or, The Red Anchor Brand.
- 104 Montezuma, the Merciless.
- 109 Captain Kyd, the King of the Black Flag.
- 116 Black Plume; or, The Sorceress of Hell Gate.
- 121 The Sea Cadet; or, The Rover of the Rigoletts.
- 123 The Chevalier Corsair; or, The Heritage.
- 131 Buckskin Sam, the Texas Traylor.
- 134 Darkey Dan, the Colored Detective.
- 139 Fire Eye; or, The Bride of a Buccaneer.
- 147 Gold Spur, the Gentleman from Texas.
- 155 The Corsair Queen; or, The Gypsies of the Sea.
- 162 The Mad Mariner; or, Dishonored and Disowned.
- 168 Wild Bill, the Pistol Dead Shot.
- 172 Black Pirate; or, The Golden Fetters Mystery.
- 177 Don Diablo, the Planter-Corsair.
- 181 The Scarlet Schooner; or, The Sea Nemesis.
- 184 The Ocean Vampire; or, The Castle Heiress.
- 189 Wild Bill's Gold Trail; or, The Desperate Dozen.
- 198 The Skeleton Schooner; or, The Skimmer.
- 205 The Gambler Pirate; or, Lady of the Lagoon.
- 210 Buccaneer Bess, the Lioness of the Sea.
- 216 The Corsair Planter; or, Driven to Doom.
- 220 The Specter Yacht; or, A Brother's Crime.
- 224 Black Beard, the Buccaneer.
- 231 The Kid Glove Miner; or, The Magic Doctor.
- 235 Red Lightning the Man of Chance.
- 246 Queen Helen, the Amazon of the Overland.
- 255 The Pirate Priest; or, The Gambler's Daughter.
- 259 Outlaw and Cross; or, the Ghouls of the Sea.
- 261 The Sea Owl; or, The Lady Captain of the Gulf.
- 307 The Phantom Pirate; or, The Water Wolves.
- 318 The Indian Buccaneer; or, The Red Rovers.
- 325 The Gentleman Pirate; or, The Casco Hermits.
- 329 The League of Three; or, Buffalo Bill's Pledge.
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- 341 The Sea Desperado.
- 346 Ocean Guerrillas; or, Phantom Midshipman.
- 362 Buffalo Bill's Grip; or, Oath Bound to Custer.
- 364 The Sea Fugitive; or, The Queen of the Coast.
- 369 The Coast Corsair; or, The Siren of the Sea.
- 373 Sailor of Fortune; or, The Barnegat Buccaneer.
- 377 Afloat and Ashore; or, The Corsair Conspirator.
- 388 The Giant Buccaneer; or, The Wrecker Witch.
- 393 The Convict Captain.
- 399 The New Monte Cristo.
- 418 The Sea Siren; or, The Fugitive Privateer.
- 425 The Sea Sword; or, The Ocean Rivals.
- 430 The Fatal Frigate; or, Rivals in Love and War.
- 435 The One-Armed Buccaneer.
- 446 Ocean Ogre, the Outcast Corsair.
- 457 The Sea Insurgent.
- 469 The Lieutenant Detective.
- 476 Bob Brent, the Buccaneer.

BY WILLIAM H. MANNING.

- 279 The Gold Dragoon, or, The California Bloodhound.
- 297 Colorado Rube, the Strong Arm of Hotspur.
- 385 Wild Dick Turpin, the Leadville Lion.
- 405 Old Baldy, the Brigadier of Buck Basin.
- 415 Hot Heart, the Detective Spy.
- 427 The Rivals of Montana Mill.
- 437 Deep Duke; or, The Man of Two Lives.
- 442 Wild West Walt, the Mountain Veteran.
- 449 Bluff Burke, King of the Rockies.
- 455 Yank Yellowbird, the Tall Hustler of the Hills.
- 463 Gold Gauntlet, the Gulch Gladiator.
- 470 The Duke of Dakota.
- 479 Gladiator Gabe, the Samson of Sassajack.

BY EDWARD WILLETT.

- 129 Mississippi Mose; or, a Strong Man's Sacrifice.
- 209 Buck Farley, the Bonanza Prince.
- 222 Bill the Blizzard; or, Red Jack's Crime.
- 248 Montana Nat, the Lion of Last Chance Camp.
- 274 Flush Fred, the Mississippi Sport.
- 289 Flush Fred's Full Hand.
- 298 Logger Lem; or, Life in the Pine Woods.
- 308 Hemlock Hank, Tough and True.
- 315 Flush Fred's Double; or, The Squatters' League.
- 327 Terrapin Dick, the Wildwood Detective.
- 337 Old Gabe, the Mountain Tramp.
- 348 Dan Dillon, King of Crosscut.
- 368 The Canyon King; or, a Price on his Head.

BY JACKSON KNOX—"Old Hawk."

- 386 Hawk Heron, the Falcon Detective.
- 424 Hawk Heron's Deputy.
- 444 The Magic Detective; or, The Hidden Hand.
- 451 Griplock, the Rocket Detective.
- 462 The Circus Detective.
- 467 Mainwaring, the Salamander.
- 477 Dead-arm Brandt.

BY BUFFALO BILL (Hon. W. F. Cody).

- 53 Death-Trailer, the Chief of Scouts.
- 83 Gold Bullet Sport; or, Knights of the Overland.
- 243 The Pilgrim Sharp; or, The Soldier's Sweetheart.
- 304 Texas Jack, the Prairie Rattler.
- 319 Wild Bill, the Whirlwind of the West.
- 394 White Beaver, the Exile of the Platte.
- 397 The Wizard Brothers; or, White Beaver's Trail.
- 401 One-Armed Pard; or, Borderland Retribution.
- 414 Red Renard, the Indian Detective.

BY JOSEPH E. BADGER, JR.

- 28 Three-Fingered Jack, the Road-Agent.
- 30 Gospel George; or, Fiery Fred, the Outlaw.
- 40 Long-Haired Pards; or, The Tartars of the Plains.
- 45 Old Bull's-Eye, the Lightning Shot.
- 47 Pacific Pete, the Prince of the Revolver.
- 50 Jack Rabbit, the Prairie Sport.
- 64 Double-Sight, the Death Shot.
- 67 The Boy Jockey; or, Honesty vs. Crookedness.
- 71 Captain Cool Blade; or, Mississippi Man Shark.
- 88 Big George; or, The Five Outlaw Brothers.
- 103 Dan Brown of Denver; or, The Detective.
- 119 Alabama Joe; or, The Yazoo Man-Hunters.
- 127 Sol Scott, the Masked Miner.
- 141 Equinox Tom, the Bully of Red Rock.
- 154 Joaquin, the Saddle King.
- 165 Joaquin, the Terrible.
- 170 Sweet William, the Trapper Detective.
- 180 Old '49; or, The Amazon of Arizona.
- 197 Revolver Rob; or, The Belle of Nugget Camp.
- 201 Pirate of the Placers; or, Joaquin's Death Hunt.
- 233 The Old Boy of Tombstone.
- 241 Spitfire Saul, King of the Rustlers.
- 249 Elephant Tom, of Durango.
- 257 Death Trap Diggings; or, A Hard Man from 'Way Back.
- 283 Sleek Sam, the Devil of the Mines.
- 286 Pistol Johnny; or, One Man in a Thousand.
- 292 Moke Horner, the Boss Roustabout.
- 302 Faro Saul, the Handsome Hercules.
- 317 Frank Lightfoot, the Miner Detective.
- 324 Old Forked Lightning, the Solitary.
- 331 Chispa Charley, the Gold Nugget Sport.
- 339 Spread Eagle Sam, the Hercules Hide Hunter.
- 345 Masked Mark, the Mounted Detective.
- 351 Nor' West Nick, the Border Detective.
- 355 Stormy Steve, the Mad Athlete.
- 360 Jumping Jerry, the Gamecock from Sundown.
- 367 A Royal Flush; or, Dan Brown's Big Game.
- 372 Captain Crisp, the Man with a Record.
- 379 Howling Jonathan, the Terror from Headwaters.
- 387 Dark Durg, the Ishmael of the Hills.
- 395 Deadly Aim, the Duke of Derringers.
- 403 The Nameless Sport.
- 409 Rob Roy Ranch; or, The Imps of Pan Handle.
- 416 Monte Jim, the Black Sheep of Bismarck.
- 426 The Ghost Detective; or, The Spy of the Secret Service.
- 433 Laughing Leo; or, Sam's Dandy Pard.
- 438 Oklahoma Nick.
- 443 A Cool Hand; or, Pistol Johnny's Picnic.
- 450 The Rustler Detective.
- 458 Dutch Dan, the Pilgrim from Spitzenberg.
- 466 Old Rough and Ready, the Sage of Sundown.
- 474 Daddy Dead-Eye, the Despot of Dew Drop.

BY CAPTAIN HOWARD HOLMES.

- 278 Hercules Goldspur, the Man of the Velvet Hand.
- 294 Broadcloth Burt, the Denver Dandy.
- 321 California Claude, the Lone Bandit.
- 335 Flash Dan, the Nabob; or, Blades of Bowie Bar.
- 340 Cool Conrad, the Dakota Detective.
- 347 Denver Duke, the Man with "Sand."
- 352 The Desperate Dozen.
- 365 Keen Kennard, the Shasta Shadow.
- 374 Major Blister, the Sport of Two Cities.
- 382 The Bonanza Band; or, Dread Don of Cool Clan.
- 392 The Lost Bonanza; or, The Boot of Silent Hound.
- 400 Captain Coldgrip; or, The New York Spotter.
- 407 Captain Coldgrip's Nerve; or, Injun Nick.
- 413 Captain Coldgrip in New York.
- 421 Father Ferret, the Frisco Shadow.
- 434 Lucifer Lynx, the Wonder Detective.
- 441 The California Sharp.
- 447 Volcano, the Frisco Spy.
- 453 Captain Coldgrip's Long Trail.
- 460 Captain Coldgrip, the Detective.
- 468 Coldgrip in Deadwood.
- 480 Hawkspear, the Man with a Secret.

BY LEON LEWIS.

- 428 The Flying Glim; or, The Island Lure.
- 456 The Demon Steer.
- 481 The Silent Detective; or, The Bogus Nephew.

BY PERCY B. ST. JOHN.

- 57 The Silent Hunter.
- 86 The Big Hunter; or, The Queen of the Woods.

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- 1 A Hard Crowd; or, Gentleman Sam's Sister.
- 4 The Kidnapper; or, The Northwest Shanghai.
- 29 Tiger Dick, Faro King; or, The Cashier's Crime.
- 54 Always on Hand; or, The Foot-Hills Sport.
- 80 A Man of Nerve; or, Caliban the Dwarf.
- 114 The Gentleman from Pike.
- 171 Tiger Dick, the Man of the Iron Heart.
- 207 Old Hard Head; or, Whirlwind and his Mare.
- 251 Tiger Dick vs. Iron Despard.
- 280 Tiger Dick's Lone Hand.
- 299 Three of a Kind; or, Tiger Dick, Iron Despard and the Sportive Sport.
- 338 Jack Sands, the Boss of the Town.
- 359 Yellow Jack, the Mestizo.
- 380 Tiger Dick's Pledge; or, The Golden Serpent.
- 404 Silver Sid; or, A "Daisy" Bluff.
- 431 California Kit, the Always on Hand.
- 472 Six Foot Si; or, The Man to "Tie To."

BY ALBERT W. AIKEN.

- 27 The Spotter Detective; or, Girls of New York.
- 31 The New York Sharp; or, The Flash of Lightning.
- 33 Overland Kit; or, The Idyl of White Pine.
- 34 Rocky Mountain Rob, the California Outlaw.
- 35 Kentuck the Sport; or, Dick Talbot of the Mines.
- 36 Injun Dick; or, The Death-Shot of Shasta.
- 38 Velvet Hand; or, Injun Dick's Iron Grip.
- 41 Gold Dan; or, The White Savage of Salt Lake.
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- 49 The Wolf Demon; or, The Kanawha Queen.
- 56 The Indian Mazeppa; or, Madman of the Plains.
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- 107 Richard Talbot, of Cinnabar.
- 112 Joe Phenix, Private Detective.
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- 161 The Wolves of New York; or, Joe Phenix's Hunt.
- 173 California John, the Pacific Thoroughbred.
- 196 La Marmoset, the Detective Queen.
- 203 The Double Detective; or, The Midnight Mystery.
- 252 The Wall Street Blood; or, The Telegraph Girl.
- 320 The Genteel Spotter; or, The N. Y. Night Hawk.
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- 354 Red Richard; or, The Crimson Cross Brand.
- 363 Crowningshield, the Detective.
- 370 The Dusky Detective; or, Pursued to the End.
- 376 Black Beards; or, The Rio Grande High Horse.
- 381 The Gypsy Gentleman; or, Nick Fox, Detective.
- 384 Injun Dick, Detective; or, Tracked to New York.
- 391 Kate Scott, the Decoy Detective.
- 408 Doc Grip, the Vendetta of Death.
- 419 The Bat of the Battery; or, Joe Phenix, Detective.
- 423 The Lone Hand; or, The Red River Recreants.
- 440 The High Horse of the Pacific.
- 461 The Fresh on the Rio Grande.
- 465 The Actor Detective.
- 475 Chin Chin, the Chinese Detective.

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